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LOYOLA UNIVERSITY CHICAGO

BEYOND UTILITY, RIGHTS, AND CARE: AN ALTERNATIVE APPROACH TO
GLOBAL POVERTY

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

PROGRAM IN PHILOSOPHY

BY

TIMOTHY A. WEIDEL

CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

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Para mi esposa, no hay ningunas palabras

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

HR	Pogge, Thomas. "Human Rights and Human Responsibilities." In <i>Global Justice and Transnational Politics</i> , edited by Pablo De Greiff and Ciaran Cronin, 151-196. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press 2002.
LYCS	Singer, Peter. <i>The Life You Can Save</i> . New York: Random House, 2009.
MER	<i>The Marx-Engels Reader</i> , edited by Robert Tucker. New York: Norton, 1978.
OW	Singer, Peter. <i>One World: The Ethics of Globalization</i> . New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002.
PAU	Pogge, Thomas. <i>Politics as Usual</i> . Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2010.
RWJ	Pogge, Thomas. "Real World Justice." <i>The Journal of Ethics</i> 9 (2005): 29-53.
SW	Marx, Karl. <i>Selected Writings</i> , edited by Lawrence Simon. Indianapolis: Hackett, 1994.
WPHR	Pogge, Thomas. <i>World Poverty and Human Rights</i> . Maldon, MA: Polity Press, 2002.

INTRODUCTION

In this dissertation, I will argue in favor of an alternative approach to the problem of global poverty, one that is distinct in significant ways from current approaches grounded in utilitarianism, human rights, or an ethic of care.

When I speak of “global poverty,” I am referring to the conditions under which a large percentage of human beings are forced to live. These conditions in practical terms mean that it is extremely difficult, and in some cases practically impossible, for almost half of all human beings on the planet to obtain the resources that are required for their minimal survival (such as adequate food, clean water, or shelter). Philosopher Thomas Pogge provides some staggering statistics:

Some 2,800 million or 46 percent of humankind live below the World Bank’s \$2/day poverty line...Over 1,200 million of them live on less than half, below the World Bank’s better-known \$1/day poverty line.¹

In his 2004 paper “Real World Justice”, Pogge paints an even more startling picture:

Some 18 million people have died prematurely each year [since the end of the Cold War] from poverty-related causes, accounting for fully one third of all human deaths. This 15-year death toll of 270 million is considerably larger than

¹ Thomas Pogge, *World Poverty and Human Rights* (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2002), 2. More recently, the World Bank has released figures that purport to show that this percentage has dropped somewhat; as of 2008, 43 percent of humans live below the \$2/day poverty line. Cf. World Bank, “World Bank Sees Progress Against Extreme Poverty, But Flags Vulnerabilities,” February 29, 2012, web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/NEWS/0,,contentMDK:23130032~pagePK:64257043~piPK:437376~theSitePK:4607,00.html.

the 200-million death toll from all the wars, civil wars, genocides and other government repression of the entire 20th century combined.²

As a response to the existence of these conditions, many different arguments have been constructed, trying to develop an approach that is not only philosophically sound, but one which also stirs the moral sensibilities of those people living in affluent countries, and compels them to act to try to aid in the eradication of global poverty.

Three of the most well-known and widely-appealed-to philosophical approaches are as follows: Peter Singer's broadly utilitarian argument, Thomas Pogge's appeal to a concept of human rights, and Virginia Held's argument based in a feminist ethic of care. These are three different attempts to ground a moral imperative to act to provide aid to poor people around the world, through one avenue or another. While these various approaches have their merits, I will argue in this dissertation that they are all insufficient (in one way or another) to deal with the problem of global poverty. Given their shortcomings, a new approach is needed.

Thus in the first portion of the dissertation I will elaborate, in turn, these three arguments, as well as examine the various philosophical and practical objections that they face.

In Chapter One, I discuss one of the most well-known and provocative contemporary responses to global poverty, which comes from the prominent utilitarian Peter Singer. Singer's argument is an attempt to generate a general moral duty to donate

² Thomas Pogge, "Real World Justice," *The Journal of Ethics*, 9 (2005): 31. As impossible as this may be to believe, Pogge (in a footnote) does the math to support his claim; this number is current as of 2005, and has obviously increased since then.

money to the global poor. While this approach is appealing in its simplicity and directness, I will argue that it is beset with internal philosophical problems. Perhaps even more importantly, however, Singer neglects to consider the *causes* of poverty. This omission undercuts the efficacy of his approach.

Chapter Two examines philosopher Thomas Pogge's argument, which centers specifically on the causal question. Pogge explicitly appeals to a concept of "human rights." As I will discuss in detail, the human rights approach claims that an individual is (or should be) bestowed with rights, meaning that she can make claims on outside entities, based on the content of her rights and the goods upon which they are focused. Correlative to these rights exist duties, which are the obligations placed on other entities. In relation to the issue of poverty, this schema of rights and duties means that if someone is impoverished (and thus having her rights to things such as food or shelter unfulfilled), another entity has a corresponding duty.

Pogge's argument is that we, the citizens of the Western developed nations, are causally implicated in the harms of global poverty by way of our economic and political institutions. Given that the actions of these institutions (which represent us and our interests) are actively harming millions of people by impoverishing them, we have a duty to stop violating the rights of the poor. His argument is not that we have a duty to *do* something, but rather than we must *stop* doing something (what he calls a "negative duty").

While I am sympathetic to his claim that we are morally implicated in causing harm to the global poor, Pogge's approach runs up against significant problems. His

answer to the question of what precisely each individual must do to stop causing poverty is particularly diffuse; it is not at all clear what I (as an individual) must do in order to satisfy my negative duty. While he offers some specific structural reforms to undercut the causes of poverty, I argue that these changes are insufficient to provide the global poor with an opportunity to have better lives.

Chapter Three looks at another important perspective on the problem of global poverty, coming from the work of philosopher Virginia Held. Drawing heavily upon the literature of a feminist ethic of care, Held argues that we have a moral responsibility to care for poor individuals around the world, and to work to make sure that their needs are met. She claims that we must reflect on our interdependency as human beings, and realize that this shared humanity connects us in a very real way to global poor. They are not merely strangers on the other side of the world, but fellow human beings to whom we are connected, and whose lives are affected in various (often negative) ways based on how we act.

But, as I will argue, Held's ethic of care argument falls short of providing sufficient motivation to act. The moral force of her argument rests on the premise that people should care about poor people being harmed merely in virtue of what it does to them (the poor). While I do not necessarily disagree, this premise does not go far enough in establishing a compelling moral motivation that is immune to readily-available objections: I can argue that I am in no way connected to people on the other side of the earth. Even if I accept such a connection, I can similarly deny that I have any moral

responsibility to provide aid (especially if I do not think that I am implicated in causing such poverty).

After identifying the unanswered objections that I argue these three approaches face, my aim in the second portion of the dissertation is to develop my own alternative approach to global poverty, one that overcomes the philosophical, motivational, and practical problems of the three arguments previously mentioned.

In Chapter Four, I argue that conditions of poverty, whether on our doorstep or around the world, are not just doing something to “them/the poor,” they are doing something to “us” (both “them” and “me”): we are forced to engage in what Jean-Paul Sartre calls “self-deception.” When we encounter a poor person, we quickly lie to ourselves in order to cover up our human impulse to provide aid to that other person. Given that poverty is not only harming the poor, but also every human being, we (affluent individuals) have a serious interest in acting to end poverty, insofar as we seek to end the harm that the existence of such poverty does to our humanity.

In order to avoid the harms of self-deception, we require a new lens through which to approach the issue of poverty. This lens has its genesis in Karl Marx’s understanding of our human nature as “species-being.” Through a detailed discussion and interpretation of Marx’s understanding of our human nature present in his early writings, I argue that he provide us with a sense that the world need not be one wherein we are continually forced to endure the harms of poverty and self-deception; another world, a more “fully human world,” is possible. Thus this positive vision of a fully

human world provides a compelling moral motivation to act to end poverty, as it is much more than just a “world without poverty.”

But what would this fully human world look like, and how can we bring it into being? In Chapter Five, I address this question by examining a key aspect of our human nature: our need for meaningful labor. I claim that this fundamental human need for meaningful labor is being denied to the poor of the world through the implementation of labor-saving technologies. Such technology (and its value within our current economic system) is a significant causal factor in the continued existence of poverty, a factor overlooked by Singer, Pogge, and Held.

To attack this root cause of poverty and create a more fully human world, I argue that we must revisit the role that labor-saving technology plays in the productive process. Because of the overzealous pursuit of monetary cost-efficiency in producing goods, labor has been devalued and (often) replaced by a level of technology that, while it produces cheaper objects for consumption, degrades and dehumanizes workers in a myriad of ways. This problem has not necessarily been made plain in philosophical examinations of poverty. As philosopher Brian Barry sarcastically remarks:

Perhaps because academics enjoy a good deal of autonomy and generally find their jobs enjoyable on balance, political philosophers are amazingly oblivious to the fact that the great majority of paid employment is a form of servitude and that those who undertake it are driven into it by sheer economic necessity.³

In essence, the results of such labor-saving technology are that we are wasting human beings by sinking them deeper and deeper into squalor, all in an effort to make goods faster and cheaper. These results of labor-saving technology are something that I

³ Brian Barry, *Why Social Justice Matters* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2006), 202.

argue must be questioned if we are to formulate an effective approach to combating conditions of poverty around the globe.

In order to realize a vision of a fully human world, one wherein poverty no longer exists and each human being has her needs met (including the need for meaningful human labor), we must alter our concepts of efficiency and labor-saving technology by focusing on providing what economist and philosopher E.F. Schumacher calls “Good Work” through “Intermediate Technology.” According to Schumacher, we should utilize technology not out of the desire to replace labor in production, but rather to enhance the labor that we do to make it more meaningful and valuable for human beings. This may mean using more human labor than is technically necessary (given the possible labor-saving technologies available), but it will importantly allow for more opportunities for poor individuals to labor meaningfully. Through Intermediate Technology, we will be able to undercut one of the root causes of poverty: a lack of meaningful labor. This, I argue, can push us towards realizing a fully human world; one wherein each individual realizes his human nature as a productive being, and one in which he is able to heed his human impulses to help fellow human beings in need, rather than masking these impulses through the harms of self-deception.

In my conclusion, I examine possible counter-arguments to my thesis, and in doing so I provide some examples of practical actions that individuals can take, and movements that are worthy of support. In the end, I argue that our moral motivation to provide aid to the global poor should come not from concerns of utility, duties of human rights, or considerations of care. Rather than establishing a strict moral obligation, I

argue that we should (and can) be moved to act out of a concern for our human nature as species-being, and a desire to avoid the ravages of the self-deception that we are forced to put ourselves through when faced with poor people. We will act not out of a sense of duty or guilt, but out of a desire to change our world for everyone's sake. This will further motivate us to eradicate poverty, as this is the only way in which we can make our world a more fully human place for all of us, ourselves and the poorest people of the world alike.

CHAPTER ONE

PETER SINGER'S UTILITARIAN APPROACH TO GLOBAL POVERTY

One of the most famous and controversial contemporary responses to global poverty comes from the Australian philosopher Peter Singer, a prominent utilitarian. His conclusion, first put forth in his 1972 article “Famine, Affluence, and Morality” and updated more recently in his books *One World: The Ethics of Globalization* (2002) and *The Life You Can Save* (2009), is that all well-off people in the world have a moral obligation to provide monetary aid to the poor.¹ Singer’s argument is broadly utilitarian in character, insofar as he is making a moral argument for aid on the grounds that the sacrifices made by those who donate are not as morally “weighty” as the benefits to those who receive aid. While I find his argument intuitively appealing (and in many ways straightforward), it does suffer from some significant philosophical problems.

In this chapter I will discuss the argument Singer puts forth in order to combat conditions of global poverty. I will first explain the argument as it originally appeared in “Famine, Affluence, and Morality.” After its publication, the argument generated a great deal of response, of which Singer has attempted to take account in his more recent formulations of the argument. I will recount these updated formulations and Singer’s attempt to deal with at least four common criticisms. Lastly, I will discuss some of the

¹ Peter Singer, “Famine, Affluence, and Morality,” *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, 1, no. 3 (Spring 1972): 229-243, Peter Singer, *One World: The Ethics of Globalization* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), hereafter abbreviated *OW*, and Peter Singer, *The Life You Can Save* (New York: Random House, 2009), hereafter abbreviated *LYCS*.

most serious objections to Singer's argument, to which I do not think he has an adequate answer. I will argue that these objections call into question the plausibility of Singer's argument, and indicate an aspect of the problem of poverty that he neglects to take into account.

But before examining Singer's argument itself, I want to trace the development of utilitarianism as a moral theory, with specific reference to its origins as a response to poverty.

The Development of Utilitarianism

The ethical theory of utilitarianism has at its base a concern for promoting the best possible outcomes for the greatest number of people. Utilitarianism classically involves a calculative aspect, where one must weigh out possible alternative courses of action, and determine the possible effects such courses of action may have on individuals and their happiness.²

While early utilitarians are often viewed as "progressive reformers," working to remedy problems in regards to representative government, individual liberty, and the penal system, their theoretical and historical roots actually developed in response to poverty, specifically the widespread poverty that resulted from early versions of a capitalist economy. Faced with such poverty, the utilitarian response was to argue that

² This central aspect of utilitarianism is often crudely referred to as being concerned with promoting the "greatest happiness for the greatest number." The term "happiness" is not used universally by all utilitarians; Jeremy Bentham, for instance, uses "pleasure" to signify the primary focus of his version of utilitarianism. While I will discuss this in more detail in the coming pages, I want to note this discrepancy here. Going forward, when describing the utilitarian position in general, I will use "happiness."

society should not undertake the “obvious” approach of providing the poor with enough money to live a decent life, as this ends up causing more disutility in the long run.

Beginning in the late 18th century, the massive boom in industry and trade as a result of colonialism created vast amounts of wealth for many Europeans, far beyond any prior riches. At the same time, however, conditions of poverty persisted, and in fact worsened. As Karl Polanyi argues in *The Great Transformation*, while many people found success in the burgeoning global marketplace, many others were plunged into poverty.³ In response to the continued and worsening impoverishment of this new working class, local English justices in the town of Speenhamland (a district of Berkshire) enacted the “Speenhamland Law” in 1795. This was a local law, but quickly spread to other areas of the countryside. While it took on many forms, the common factor was to provide subsidies to poor workers. These subsidies were payments granted to workers (made in accordance with a scale dependent upon the price of bread) in addition to their wages. This meant, according to Polanyi, that “a minimum income should be assured to the poor *irrespective of their earnings*.”⁴

While this policy was enacted with beneficent intent in order to try to help the poor climb out of poverty, the Speenhamland experiment had disastrous effects in the long run. Freed from the negative consequences of wage fluctuations, workers ceased to be concerned with their level of productivity at work. Similarly, employers saw no

³ Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2001).

⁴ Ibid., 82. At the time and for decades afterwards, according to Polanyi, the Speenhamland Law (and its later retraction under the Poor Law Reforms) was regularly cited throughout Europe as the perfect example of a failed policy to provide aid to the poor. Both Bentham and Mill make reference to its failings in developing their own proposals for dealing with poverty. And yet, a few hundred years later, the Speenhamland experiment has all but vanished from memory.

reason to ever raise wages (and in fact saw more reason to continually lower them), as they knew that their workers would receive their subsidies regardless of what they were paid in wages. Consequently, enterprises stopped growing as fast as they had previously; less productive workers meant less profits and growth. As wages became “bottomless,” the poor saw the subsidies as more attractive than laboring for a pittance. Productivity fell at an ever-increasing rate, and coupled with the enclosure of common agricultural lands, poor people had little choice other than to try to survive on the Speenhamland subsidies indefinitely.⁵ Thus the Speenhamland experiment actually made things worse; rather than solving the problem, conditions of poverty persisted, and became further entrenched in society.

In response, Polanyi argues, there came about a shift in the economic and ethical philosophies of the time:

The traditional unity of a Christian society was giving place to a denial of responsibility on the part of the well-to-do for the condition of their fellows...Scholars proclaimed in unison that a science had been discovered which put the laws governing man's world beyond any doubt. It was at the behest of these laws that compassion was removed from the hearts, and a stoic determination to renounce human solidarity in the name of the greatest happiness of the greatest number gained the dignity of a secular religion.⁶

This new science was modern political economy, with its law of supply and demand, and its focus on competitive markets for labor. Political economy determined that if business

⁵ Polanyi rightly points out that the Speenhamland experiment didn't happen in a vacuum; workers might have been able to form trade unions to push for higher wages and better conditions (thus decreasing the need for the subsidies). However, at the time, Britain had passed the Anti-Combination Laws of 1799-1800, which barred such labor organization, and therefore workers had no power to push for higher wages. Thus the Speenhamland mandates ended up actually depressing wages, and became in essence a subsidy to *employers*, since they were free from having to pay any semblance of a living wage; even while taking home only a pittance in wages, workers could receive the Speenhamland subsidies, and thus still survive to return to work the next day. Cf. *Ibid.*, 85-86, 285.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 106-107.

enterprises wanted to succeed, society could not fall prey to the sentiments of Christian charity; aid to the poor should be severely restricted, if not altogether eliminated. As a complement to this science, the moral theory of utilitarianism developed, and held that societal rules should be instituted in order to produce the greatest happiness for the greatest number of people. Utilitarianism justified giving aid to the poor only if it could be done in such a way that would produce some greater benefit to society as a whole.

Utilitarianism was developed and championed early on by Jeremy Bentham. Bentham and other early utilitarians jettisoned the natural rights approach that came down from Locke, Rousseau, and other Enlightenment philosophers.⁷ They focused, not on individuals as possessors of rights, but on the greater good (utility) that institutions should produce for society as a whole. This theory offered reasons why society should *not* take the seemingly obvious initiatives to correct poverty, such as simply providing to the poor enough money to subsist.

Bentham's utilitarianism is set firmly against the existence of natural rights. He famously claims that "Natural rights is simple nonsense: natural and imprescriptible rights, rhetorical nonsense, nonsense upon stilts," and that such a concept as rights has no bearing outside of a governmental structure.⁸ Rather than individuals as beings bestowed with rights, Bentham instead focuses on what he sees as an inherent aspect of human beings: the pursuit of pleasure (and the avoidance of pain). Since all of our actions are

⁷ I will detail this concept of natural rights in the beginning of Chapter Two, focusing mainly on the work of John Locke.

⁸ Jeremy Bentham, "Anarchical Fallacies," in *The Works of Jeremy Bentham*, Vol. 2, Ed. John Bowring (New York: Russell and Russell, Inc., 1843), 501.

focused on this dual goal, so our social rules should seek to provide the greatest amount of pleasure (and least amount of pain) for the greatest number of people.

In accordance with this governing principle, Bentham advocated industrial houses for the poor, rather than any kind of “free aid.” These Industry-Houses, functioning along the lines of his famous Panopticon prison plan, would force poor people to work to produce commodities. These Industry-Houses would keep the poor from starving by giving them work and shelter, while at the same time creating monetary gain for shareholders of such houses (as they would be capitalist enterprises). While this plan offered some minimal level of subsistence for the poor, the overarching aim was borne out of a utilitarian calculation that the out-of-work “hands” (as Bentham refers to them) could be put to use in order to provide the most benefit to society as a whole. The poor gain the pleasure of food and shelter (avoiding the pain of death), and society gains the benefit of cheap labor and more production.⁹

John Stuart Mill revises Bentham’s utilitarianism; rather than arguing that our actions are morally right if they merely produce maximal pleasure for the greatest number of people, Mill argues that since human beings are capable of different kinds of happiness, “greatest happiness” must be understood in terms of “higher” and “lower” pleasures.¹⁰ Mill applies this theory of utilitarianism to the issue of individual liberty.

⁹ Cf. Polanyi, 111-112 where he refers to the pamphlet *Pauper Management*, published in 1797, which Bentham and his brother wrote to detail these proposed Industry-Houses. The Panopticon was a prison house designed along the lines of a utilitarian calculus: a central guard tower surrounded by sectors of inmates put to work in manual labor. This maximized the utility of the project by ensuring that only the minimum amount of guards and resources were used, all the while providing the most benefit to society (by containing criminals and putting them to use in producing goods).

¹⁰ In his essay *Utilitarianism* Mill makes this distinction between what he calls “higher” and “lower” pleasures. I will return to this argument in greater detail in the Chapter Four.

He argues societal happiness will increase maximally if individuals are allowed broad liberty. Liberty should only be curtailed by a government (or public opinion) in order to prevent harm to other people.

Regarding the issue of widespread poverty, Mill agrees with Bentham in terms of rejecting the Speenhamland attempts to provide directly for the subsistence of the poor, but he eschews Bentham's proposal to set up for-profit labor houses for the poor. Mill argues that the poor should not be given amounts of money that will make them so comfortable that they quit laboring, but rather be given just enough to provide a bare, meager existence. He does not want to force the poor into industry houses (as Bentham did), as that interferes too much with individual liberty. At the same time, however, he is critical of the past efforts to deal with the problem of poverty:

To give profusely to the people, whether under the name of charity or of employment, without placing them under such influences that prudential motives shall act powerfully upon them, is to lavish the means of benefitting mankind, without attaining the object... Guarantee to them a certain payment, either by law, or by the feeling of the community, and no amount of comfort that you can give them will make either them or their descendants look to their own self-restraint as the proper means of preserving them in that state.¹¹

Thus according to Mill, poor relief should be sufficiently unattractive that people will not lose "self-restraint" and turn to it in lieu of employment. He is willing to provide them some scant aid, so long as it is not "profuse," for profuse aid undercuts their motivation to labor.

¹¹ John Stuart Mill, "Principles of Political Economy," in *Collected Works of John Stuart Mill*, Vol. 2, Ed. J.M. Robson (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1965), 359. Interestingly, Mill goes on to argue that if the poor are to be given any subsidies, then society has the moral grounds to limit the poor from bearing children ("dependents") since, while this limits their liberty, it has better consequences in terms of societal utility over time (there are less people to subsidize). "If [the state provides subsidies], it is bound in self-protection and for the sake of every purpose for which government exists, to provide that no person shall be born without its consent."

Overall, both Bentham and Mill historically responded to conditions of poverty by arguing that society should not provide significant subsidies to the poor, as this ends up acting contrary to utilitarian goal of maximizing happiness for the greatest number of people. The poor only need be given the opportunity (through Industry-Houses or direct aid) to keep from starving.

Peter Singer's Contemporary Utilitarianism

In contemporary discussion of global poverty, a utilitarian approach has emerged in the work of Peter Singer. In sharp contrast to the views of his historical predecessors, Singer claims that a utilitarian ethic justifies giving sufficient money to the poor to provide them with a decent level of subsistence.

The Original Argument

In his famous 1972 essay "Famine, Affluence, and Morality," Singer begins by offering a much-quoted example: "If I am walking past a shallow pond and see a child drowning in it, I ought to wade in and pull the child out. This will mean getting my clothes muddy, but this is insignificant, while the death of the child would presumably be a very bad thing."¹² In light of this example, Singer puts forth what he sees as an accepted general moral principle, readily justifiable on utilitarian grounds: "If it is in our power to prevent something bad from happening, without thereby sacrificing anything of comparable moral importance, we ought, morally, to do it."¹³

¹² Peter Singer, "Famine, Affluence, and Morality," 230.

¹³Ibid. The "comparable moral importance" principle at the base of Singer's argument is *not*, strictly speaking, utilitarian; it is simply a moral principle that Singer argues we currently endorse in our common sense morality, insofar as we feel a person should help another if he will only have to sacrifice something minor to do so. At the same time, this principle *may* be able to be justified in utilitarian terms: if we are in a position where we can sacrifice a little of our own happiness in order to prevent something as disastrous

Singer claims that in the example we respond and pull out the child because of the above general principle. Given this general principle, he argues that we in fact have an obligation to aid the global poor, whether or not we realize this obligation. Since dying as a result of starvation, illness, etc. is a very bad thing (a great disutility), and it will cost little in terms of happiness/utility to aid the global poor, we are morally obligated to do so. In practical terms, this means that each individual person who has any kind of surplus wealth should donate that surplus to the poor. In an effort to preempt objections about whether or not such aid will actually help poor people, Singer suggests poverty relief organizations such as Oxfam or UNICEF as examples of organizations that have solid track records in terms of using donations to provide aid. If you live so comfortably that you are able to afford new clothes, dinner at a nice restaurant, or tickets to a movie, you have a moral obligation to donate to the poor. The marginal happiness/utility that you can gain by treating yourself to such luxuries (an evening of relaxation or entertainment) is far outweighed by the utility of donating the money, as it will lead to a child's life being saved.

The Updated Argument

In recent years, Singer has expanded and updated his argument for a moral imperative to provide monetary aid to the global poor. In his most recent books *One World: The Ethics of Globalization* (2002) and *The Life You Can Save* (2009) he again begins with the image of a small child drowning in a shallow pond, but works to further expound upon his original formulation.

as starvation or death for another, we are morally bound to perform that action (provided this action will thus maximize utility, in comparison with other possible alternative courses of action).

First, Singer begins with the empirical question: exactly how wealthy are people in developed countries such as the United States, compared to the poorest in the world? He points out that according to a 1999 United Nations Development Program report, the assets of the three wealthiest individuals in the world exceed the combined Gross National Product of all of the least developed countries, with a total population of over 600 million people.¹⁴ Lest we think that Singer's argument thus should only apply directly to these extremely wealthy individuals, he also notes that the average person in the United States (even those classified as "poor" according to the U.S. Census Bureau) can afford many luxuries: "In the United States, 97 percent of those classified by the Census Bureau as poor own a color TV. Three quarters of them own a car. Three quarters of them have air-conditioning. Three quarters of them have a VCR or DVD player."¹⁵ Thus even outside of the extremely wealthy and the "comfortable" middle class, the difficulties of the less-well-off in the United States are "of a different order" than those poor people in developing nations, who must fight daily to meet their basic needs.

Given the implications of the drowning child example and the clear abundance of disposable income in Western households, Singer rhetorically asks whether or not it is "wrong" not to contribute to poverty relief efforts. To strengthen his initial argument, he offers another imaginary example, a version of which he has adapted from Peter Unger's book *Living High and Letting Die*:

¹⁴ OW, 81.

¹⁵ LYCS, 8. Singer goes on to detail the amount of food waste the American middle class produces, as well as how much expendable income they have available to use for consumer goods and entertainment.

Bob is close to retirement. He has invested most of his savings in a very rare and valuable old car, a Bugatti, which he has not been able to insure. The Bugatti is his pride and joy. Not only does Bob get pleasure from driving and caring for his car, he also knows that its rising market value means that he will be able to sell it and live comfortably after retirement. One day when Bob is out for a drive, he parks the Bugatti near the end of a railway siding and goes for a walk up the track. As he does so, he sees that a runaway train, with no one aboard, is rolling down the railway track. Looking farther down the track, he sees a small figure of a child who appears to be absorbed in playing on the tracks. Oblivious to the runaway train, the child is in great danger. Bob can't stop the train, and the child is too far away to hear his warning shout, but Bob can throw a switch that will divert the train down the siding where his Bugatti is parked. If he does so, nobody will be killed, but the train will crash through the decaying barrier at the end of the siding and destroy his Bugatti. Thinking of his joy in owning the car and the financial security it represents, Bob decides not to throw the switch.¹⁶

Singer points out that this example mirrors his drowning child example, with at least one difference. There is some factor of uncertainty involved: Bob does not *know* that the child will die as a result of his inaction, as it is possible that the child will hear the train and jump to safety at the last minute.

And yet, Singer claims that almost everyone responds to both examples in the same way: they say that we should wade in to save the drowning child, and that Bob acted poorly when he decided not to throw the switch and destroy his car; he should have thrown the switch to save the child instead. No matter how important and valuable the car was to Bob, they say, we cannot take a serious risk with a child's life merely to save a car. On the basis of these two examples, Singer claims that thinking in concrete terms reveals a shared intuition: we ought to help others in need when we are in a position to aid them. Singer then restates his general moral argument, which "instead of pulling at your heartstrings by focusing on a single child in need, [the argument] appeals to your

¹⁶ Ibid., 13-14. The original example (in some greater detail) appears in Peter Unger, *Living High and Letting Die* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 135-136.

reason and seeks your assent to an abstract but compelling moral principle.”¹⁷ He

formalizes the argument as follows:

First premise: Suffering and death from lack of food, shelter, and medical care are bad.

Second premise: If it is in your power to prevent something bad from happening, without sacrificing anything nearly as important, it is wrong not to do so.

Third premise: By donating to aid agencies, you can prevent suffering and death from lack of food, shelter, and medical care, without sacrificing anything nearly as important.

Conclusion: Therefore, if you do not donate to aid agencies, you are doing something wrong.¹⁸

Examining each of the premises in turn, Singer claims that we must accept that the argument is sound. The first premise is clearly true, as suffering and death as a result of conditions of poverty are unquestionably bad. The second premise, he claims, is equally as hard to reject, as the phrase “nearly as important” provides us some wiggle room when it comes to practical situations. Neglecting one child to save another (taking food from my own hungry child and giving it to another, for example) certainly involves sacrificing something that is equally as important, and thus this premise does not require us to perform that action. The third premise may raise some practical questions (which I will mention later), but on the whole it is true that a donation to an aid agency can prevent the extremely bad results of some people dying due to poverty. Thus, according

¹⁷ Singer, *LYCS*, 17.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 15-16. To be clear, this is Singer’s formulation of his argument’s premises and conclusion. His argument incorporates aid agencies in order to preemptively answer objections about how exactly an individual is to go about donating his money to poor people. Notice that the portion of his conclusion relating to aid agencies does not necessarily follow from the premises; it is possible for someone to take other courses of action to fulfill his duty to aid the global poor.

to Singer, since it appears that the premises are true, the conclusion must be true: if I do not donate, I am doing something morally wrong.

It's worth taking a moment to examine Singer's practical discussion of exactly how much he thinks each individual Westerner should give. To answer this question, Singer turns to the Millennium Development Goals, adopted by the United Nations in 2000 as a set of practical goals to which to work towards by 2015. These goals include reducing by half the number of the world's people living in extreme poverty, along with similarly reducing the number of people suffering from malnutrition, child mortality, lack of primary schooling, and HIV/AIDS.¹⁹ The economist Jeffrey Sachs worked with the U.N. to reach an estimated cost of achieving these goals: \$121 billion in 2006, rising to \$189 billion by 2015. Taking into account a (rough) average income across Western nations, Singer argues that if every person gave their fair share (meaning that we all gave an equal amount), it would mean \$200 per year per person; this would generate around \$171 billion, clearly within the range for which Sachs and the U.N. are striving. This sum of \$200 per person per year seems incredibly paltry, compared to the amount of money Westerners spend on all kinds of luxury items.

Singer recognizes that this initial "fair share" position is too basic; it does not take into account the discrepancies in income among Western citizens. While his above standard for donation seems "fair" in one sense (everyone gives \$200), it also seems unfair that people at and below the average level of income give \$200, while millionaires and billionaires have only to meet the same standard (which pales in comparison to their

¹⁹ For the full list and a more detailed description, see *LYCS*, 142. As Singer points out, these goals only seek to *halve* poverty, rather than eradicating it outright.

vast wealth). Given this concern, he modifies his understanding of “fairness,” and instead argues for a sliding scale in terms of the amount that people are morally bound to donate, based on their income. Thus a person who makes a lot of money is obligated to donate a greater percentage of his income, and conversely a person who makes very little would have to donate less than \$200.²⁰ Generally speaking, he argues that everyone should at least give 1% of their income, those people in the top 5%-10% income bracket should give 5%, and those with an income upwards of (roughly) \$148,000 should give 10% per year. This scale is meant to modify our moral responsibilities in terms of a more appropriate sense of “fairness.”

Thus taking Singer’s argument seriously alters our standard view of philanthropy in a significant way, and turns it into a strict moral obligation. As Singer says:

We tend to assume that if people do not harm others, keep their promises, do not lie or cheat, support their children and their elderly parents, and perhaps contribute a little to needier members of their local community, they’ve done well. If we have money left over after meeting our needs and those of our dependents, we may spend it as we please. Giving to strangers, especially those beyond one’s community, may be good, but we don’t think of it as something we *have* to do. But if the basic argument presented above is right, then what many of us consider acceptable behavior must be viewed in a new, more ominous light. When we spend our surplus on concerts or fashionable shoes, on fine dining and good wines, or on holidays in faraway lands, we are doing something wrong.²¹

²⁰ See *LYCS*, 162-168 for his precise calculations and breakdown of this sliding scale. By enacting this scale, Singer points out that the donations from only the top 10% of American families would yield somewhere around \$471 billion per year, which is *well* beyond the \$189 billion required to meet the Millennium Development Goals. Thus we would be able to raise plenty more in donations than is minimally necessary.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 18. It’s worth noting that Singer takes time to work through the texts of the major religions, pointing out how all of them contain a great number of direct references to duties to aid and care for the poor. As such, he points out that the argument he is making is not in any way outlandish or contrary to standard historical grounds for moral behavior, but rather runs parallel to those teachings. Cf. *LYCS*, 19-22.

Those who donate to aid agencies aren't doing something supererogatory, but rather doing what our moral code says they *must* do. By implication, then, those who *don't* donate are in some way neglecting their moral duties.

Dealing With the Most Common Responses and Objections

With the argument fully developed, Singer then turns his attention to some of the most common objections that he has faced in the years since he first published “Famine, Affluence, and Morality.” As we shall see, these are not the only objections raised to Singer's argument, but they are some of the most common.²²

The first objection Singer examines is the claim that people (i.e. affluent Westerners) worked hard to earn their money, and as a result that gives them the right to spend it however they so choose. At face value, Singer says, this appears to follow a common-sense version of fairness. Yet what these respondents fail to acknowledge is the great influence that their environment has had upon their ability to earn a comfortable life as a result of hard work. As such, the pure luck of being born into a society so structured (as well as the pure luck of being born with certain desirable abilities) is totally overlooked. Singer cites the economist and social scientist Herbert Simon, who estimates that “social capital” is responsible for 90 percent of what people earn in wealthy societies. Such social capital refers to good physical infrastructure, an effective police force and judiciary, enforced property rights, reliable power and sanitation systems, and

²² Singer details how many of these responses come from a research group of students at an affluent suburban high school. A Harvard graduate student doing research provided the students with an early version of Singer's argument to read, and then interviewed them afterwards, compiling their responses. See here *LYCS*, 24-41.

so on.²³ Being born into a society with such aspects in place was purely a result of luck, rather than any individual effort. Without such social capital in place, even the hardest worker would struggle to escape a life of poverty. Singer mentions the billionaire businessman Warren Buffet, who quipped: “If you stick me down in the middle of Bangladesh or Peru, you’ll find out how much this talent is going to produce in the wrong kind of soil.”²⁴ Thus the resultant wealth of a person has as much (or perhaps more) to do with the “soil” in which they end up planted, rather than their efforts, no matter how Herculean.

Furthermore, Singer argues that while a person has a “right” to do whatever she wants with her money, this does not settle the question of what she *should* do with it. We, as the outside observer, can still say that what she is doing with her money, whether it be buying fancy clothes, taking lavish vacations, or flushing it down the toilet, shows a deplorable lack of empathy, and thus is morally reprehensible. In this way, says Singer, we can’t use force to take away a rich person’s money, but we can say that she should choose to give it up based on an appeal to this particular moral standard.²⁵

The second objection Singer takes up is the claim that, since the United States is “the most generous nation,” the individual Westerner does not have a moral obligation to donate any *more* money. As a society, we are certainly “already giving enough” through standard avenues of taxation. To this response, Singer references many statistics at

²³ Ibid., 26-27.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ By “force,” Singer is referring to taking the money from a rich person at gunpoint, rather than through avenues such as taxation (with which I surmise he would not take issue).

length to prove that in fact the opposite is true. He cites the Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD) figures, which show that as of 2006 the United States is second-to-last on the list of industrialized nations in terms of giving a percentage of its national income to foreign aid. While the average ratio for developed nations is 46 cents/\$100 (46 cents of every \$100 generated in national income is donated as aid), the ratio for the U.S. is 18 cents/\$100 (the proposed United Nations target goal is 70 cents/\$100). Viewed as a percentage of the federal government's annual budget, foreign aid comprises less than 1%.²⁶ Either way, the reality is that the U.S. is near the bottom of the list of developed nations, rather than at the top. In addition, Singer notes that the ten poorest countries in the world receive only 5% of all U.S. foreign aid; the majority of such aid goes to countries such as Iraq, Afghanistan, Egypt, and Israel, where the U.S. has a great deal of strategic interest.²⁷ As such, the aid does not go to the countries with the greatest number of impoverished individuals, but rather to countries where our aid helps our political aims.

The standard rejoinder to this reality, according to Singer, is to point towards private charitable giving; surely the wide prevalence of charitable organizations means that Americans still end up giving the most as a society. Taking into account private charitable giving, our contribution rises to around 2.2% of gross national income, which appears *prima facie* to be much more respectable. But underneath this rosy number are a

²⁶ Ibid., 33-35. Singer notes that when asked in surveys, almost 50% of respondents thought that the U.S. gave 15-20% of its national income to foreign aid, even though the real number is less than 1%! In addition, "A majority of people in these surveys also said that America gives too much aid – but when they were asked how much America should give, the median answers ranged from 5 percent to 10 percent of government spending. In other words, people wanted foreign aid 'cut' to an amount five to ten times greater than the U.S. actually gives!" (Ibid., 35).

²⁷ Ibid., 107.

few problematic facts: the first is that well over a third of this donated money goes to religious organizations, and they use a great deal of the money to pay clergy and build houses of worship. Another large portion goes to the education sector, meaning universities, libraries, etc. As such, even the most optimistic estimates claim that less than 10% of private philanthropy goes to organizations that use the money to aid the poor directly in developing nations.²⁸

Thus the claim that the United States and/or its people are the most charitable is statistically untrue. In addition, the ways in which giving occurs most often don't lend themselves to alleviating actual conditions of poverty around the world. As Singer says, one cannot escape his conclusion by trying to claim we've given enough already; as the numbers indicate, we have a long way to go to be able to make such a claim.

A third major objection that Singer discusses has to do with claims about human nature and our moral motivations to aid people across the globe. Singer describes what he sees as one of the most common psychological barriers to people acting as a result of his argument: what he calls "parochialism." Parochialism describes the situation in which we feel that we are only able to care for those directly around us, or that our concern for the welfare of other people is limited to our kin (and a few select, but nearby, others). As a result, those who use this psychological evidence against Singer claim that it is just "not in our nature" to be able to care about those far away, regardless of how much they are suffering.

²⁸ Cf. *LYCS*, 23-24 and *OW*, 180-184. One might respond to Singer here by claiming that in the long run, such donations and investments in education and religion can increase utility by providing the poor ways out of poverty, or some sense of dignity and hope through religious belief. While these are interesting utilitarian rejoinders to Singer, I surmise he would argue that such benefits, while possible, are meaningless (and less likely to come about) if individuals do not have access to adequate food, water, or shelter.

Singer admits that such psychological evidence exists, although he claims it is a result of evolutionary considerations, wherein human beings millions of years ago required such kin-centric feelings in order to pass on our genes; if we did not care for our children, they would not survive to carry on our genes. While we are still biologically predisposed to care for our kin, this fact now exists alongside an explosion in global interconnectedness. Thanks to today's media and information technology, it is very easy to interact with other people across the globe, and to see their suffering and need. Thus it is clearly false to say that we have no means of recognizing the needs of others around the globe, or ways in which we can provide aid. Singer says that our psychology can certainly adjust to incorporate these other people, and thus it does not absolve us of his strict moral obligation.

In a related formulation of the parochialism objection, some respondents claim that we have a greater moral duty to provide for those with whom we have close personal relationships or those who are members of our nation/state than we do to provide for other human beings on the other side of the world; thus it is morally acceptable to value the needs of these people over the needs of poor people thousands of miles away.²⁹ To

²⁹ One such respondent is philosopher Richard Miller; Miller argues that one of the biggest holes in Singer's approach is that it neglects the importance of relationships between human persons. He claims that this simply isn't a realistic picture of our world, in terms of our connection to others. Instead of a moral imperative that directly disregards our relationships, Miller argues that we have to develop a view that actually incorporates our relationships and feelings of connection to certain others. In order to take account of our relationships to people close to us, while still arguing for some obligation to aid the global poor, Miller distinguishes between what he calls Singer's Principle of Sacrifice, and Miller's own version, called a Principle of Sympathy. Singer's argument generates a Principle of Sacrifice, whereby we must "sacrifice" any extra income we have in order to save another's life. Irrespective of how unrelated to this other we are, we must sacrifice to help them. On the other hand, Miller proposes a somewhat less stringent standard, founded upon a Principle of Sympathy. Here we still have a moral obligation to aid the global poor, grounded in some consideration of their dire poverty relative to our affluence, but Miller's standard is clear from his language: we must have "sympathy" for the poor. This means that we have some control over what we are to do in order to act on this sympathy. We needn't "sacrifice" according to some

this objection, Singer takes a direct approach, claiming that this line of thinking suffers from an “is implies ought” problem. As he explains, “the fact that we tend to favor our families, communities, and countries may explain our failure to save the lives of the poor beyond those boundaries, but it does not justify that failure from an ethical perspective, no matter how many generations of our ancestors have seen nothing wrong with it.”³⁰ It is no doubt true that affluent Westerners have compatriots who are in need; but, according to Singer, unless they are in as dire a situation as those individuals living in extreme poverty, one cannot justify spending the money on one’s neighbors.³¹ He claims that in almost all cases you can take care of your friends and family using far less money that you are used to spending (and thereby actually have money left over to help the poor). We can provide food, clothing, and shelter for our children and other close relations quite adequately without dining at expensive restaurants, purchasing designer clothing, or building houses full of extra bathrooms and bedrooms. While Singer admits that human beings have clear attachment feelings towards their children and kin, he

impersonal standard. In this way, he allows the philanthropist to take into account what it is she is giving up, how central it was to her life, *as well as* to the lives of others to whom she sees herself relationally connected.

Unfortunately, Miller is quite vague about the practical implications of this Principle of Sympathy, and how such relational considerations play out in actual decisions of how much to give. See here Richard Miller, *Globalizing Justice: The Ethics of Poverty and Power* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), especially 12-13. While Miller’s principle is in some ways different from Singer’s, it could still fall prey to some of the objections that Singer’s argument faces. Moreover, it’s possible that Singer could respond to Miller by pointing out that the caveat in the general moral principle about “sacrificing anything of comparable moral worth” *does* in fact take into account our relationships.

³⁰ *LYCS*, 41.

³¹ Singer acknowledges that even those who are disposed to aid those in need oftentimes claim that such aid should go first and foremost to those poor people living in their own country (thus espousing some relational connection between countrymen). In response, Singer strongly defends his argument to aid the “worst off” in the world who live in absolute poverty, regardless of whether or not we live in the same country: “Reducing the numbers of human beings living in absolute poverty is surely a more urgent priority than reducing the relative poverty caused by some people living in palaces while others live in houses that are merely adequate.” *OW*, 175.

claims this does not justify such limitless spending on these people to whom we feel such attachments. Harkening back to the utilitarian character of his argument, he notes that our attachment feelings do not in and of themselves appear to sufficiently justify placing a thousand times more importance on the lives of our children than the children of strangers (especially when those strangers' children live in mortal danger as a result of conditions of poverty).³² Notice that this argument does not require individuals to totally neglect their own children in order to save the lives of other children living in poverty around the world. Such actions would clearly cause the donator to "sacrifice something of comparable moral importance," and thus they are not obligated to do such a thing. Yet this caveat alone does not therefore mean that such relationships can overtake a concern for the needs of the poor, no matter how "unrelated" to us they are.

The last objection Singer examines has to do with the "fairness argument" described above, where we should all pitch in and provide our \$200 donation per year in order to help those in need. Singer notes that although he has derived this number on the assumption that everyone would donate their fair share, we certainly must recognize the reality that not everyone will do so. There are two related objections that arise from this possibility: first, some may ask why they have to give anything at all, since others may not do so. If others aren't going to help, why am I to be stuck with the check, so to

³² In relation to this issue of placing more importance upon the lives of one's children than on poor children around the world, Singer relates the story of Zell Kravinsky, who has donated all of his family's wealth (minus enough to survive adequately) to poverty relief. Taking a stance that all life is in fact equal, Kravinsky has even donated a kidney, regardless of the possibility that one of his children may need a kidney in the future. While Singer acknowledges that most people would see Kravinsky's actions as supererogatory, Singer praises him for doing the right thing. See here Peter Singer, "What Should a Billionaire Give – and What Should You?" *The New York Times Magazine*, Dec. 17, 2006.

speak? In response, Singer puts forth a modified version of his original drowning child example to force us to think about our moral duties in relation to the actions of others:

You are walking past the shallow pond when you see that ten children have fallen in and need to be rescued. Glancing around, you see no parents or caregivers, but you do notice that, as well as yourself, there are nine adults who have just arrived at the pond, have also seen the drowning children, and are in as good as position as you to rescue a child.³³

In this scenario, Singer says, we are morally responsible to wade in and save a child, regardless of whether or not anyone else acts. The mere presence of other moral actors with identical duties in the scenario does nothing to affect the demands of our obligation. Even if those other people totally neglect their moral duties, it does not diminish our own.

This then brings up the second concern, voiced by what Singer calls the “fair-share” theorists. They would say that since you have done your fair share in rescuing one child, you have no further obligation to do anything. In response to these fair-share theorists, Singer continues in his example:

So you rush into the water, grab a child, and place him safely away from the water. You look up, expecting that every other adult will have done the same, and all the children will therefore be safe, but to your dismay you see that while four other adults have each rescued a child, the other five just strolled on. In the pond there are still five children, apparently about to drown.³⁴

Singer finds this fair-share view appalling, insofar as he says one cannot sit back and be satisfied that he performed his minimal moral duty (outlined in terms of ten possible rescuers and ten drowning children); just because the other people neglected to act does not mean that you can be somehow morally innocent if you stopped after one child. Our moral obligation in this situation holds not only in the instance of saving one

³³ *LYCS*, 145.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

child, but carries on to saving other children, regardless of the actions of other people. The fact that others neglected their moral obligations does not lessen our own, and in fact in this may increase the mandate of our individual obligation. In the same way, just because other people may not contribute to poverty relief efforts, I cannot sit back and say that I therefore don't have to do my fair share, or that I don't have to try to make up for such "moral obligation deserters."

Overall, Singer is able to deal with these four common objections to his argument as discussed above: (a) The claim that those with expendable income have earned it, and as a result they have a right to spend it as they see fit, (b) that the United States is by far the most generous nation already, and thus we have no obligation to give any more money to the poor, (c) that we only have a duty to those close to us, and can't be expected (given human nature) to care about others who are far away from us, and finally (d) that it is not "fair" to require that a person contribute if others won't do the same, or to demand that we do more than our "fair share" when others fail to do theirs.

Three More Critiques of Singer's Utilitarian Argument

While I think Singer successfully defends his position against these possible objections, his argument still runs up against problems to which I don't think he has an adequate answer.

A Utilitarian Paradox

The first problem has to do with how his argument plays out, regarding exactly how much each individual is morally bound to give. Taking his basic argument seriously would have extremely significant effects on our daily lives. Thinking back to the

information Singer provides about how much expendable income Americans of all classes have, his argument dictates that we must donate that extra income to poverty relief efforts. Even after mailing off a small donation to an aid agency, one cannot go out to dinner or open a celebratory bottle of champagne, as the money spent on those luxuries could have also been sent to help those in need. Strictly speaking, on the terms of the argument, “You must keep cutting back on unnecessary spending, and donating what you save, until you have reduced yourself to the point where if you give any more, you will be sacrificing something nearly as important as a child’s life – like giving so much that you can no longer afford to give your children an adequate education.”³⁵ Since taking in a movie or having a glass of champagne is not as important as saving a child’s life, it must be done without, and the savings contributed to aid the poor.

The implications of Singer’s argument in practical terms mean that we need to *drastically* reduce our consumption and spending to a minimal level, to a point that leaves us just barely better off than those to whom we would be donating. In addition, we need to set aside any feelings of partiality towards our family, friends, or compatriots. Thus we would all need to be Zell Kravinsky (see note 32): give away all that you can (including your kidney) to poverty relief, keeping only the very minimum that you need for you and your family to survive. This standard seems to require a great deal, far more than the average individual Westerner can stomach. Regardless of whether or not individuals *can* afford to do this, constructing a morality wherein this is the prescribed standard looks to be going too far.

³⁵ Ibid., 18.

Singer appears to be aware of such a problem; he acknowledges that the strict conclusion of his argument may not actually have the intended consequences. Instead of people donating all they can, they will be turned off by such a stringent standard, and instead give little or nothing.³⁶ It is here that he steps headlong into the paradox: he discards the strong version of his utilitarian argument *for other utilitarian reasons*. Rather than trying to convince people of his strong conclusion, he downplays it, and turns to his “fair-share” view. On the first version of this update, he works to establish a minimum amount that each individual should donate (in relation to the U.N. Millennium Development Goals). Thus if everyone gave at least this minimum amount of \$200, we would generate the required amount to eradicate poverty. Realizing that prescription based on “fairness” neglects to take account of differences in income, Singer develops a sliding scale to apply to the “fair-share” view, wherein each person has to give a certain amount proportional to her income (and thus the richer one is, the more one donates).

Notice however that Singer, in the discussion of the “ten drowning children” example above, explicitly argues *against* the fair-share view. His original argument does not allow for a reliance on any minimum standard; we must keep giving until by giving we would actually be causing more harm than benefit. I am not morally allowed to stop after saving one child just because other passersby will not wade in on behalf of the other nine drowning children. I must keep going back into the pond until all the children have been saved.

³⁶ Philosopher Colin McGinn responds to Singer’s original argument along these very lines, claiming that such a utilitarian standard is far too stringent, and forces human beings to succumb to “sentimentality,” rather than “moral truth.” See here Colin McGinn, “Our Duties to Animals and the Poor,” in *Singer and His Critics*, ed. Dale Jamieson (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1999), 159-160.

Singer's position thus ends up being rather befuddling. On the one hand he wants to justify his argument on strict utilitarian grounds, and the logical conclusion of this argument is clear: we have to keep giving money to the poor until by doing so we will be creating disutility for ourselves.

But realizing that this argument may not actually increase utility in terms of generating donations, he deliberately incorporates a "fair-share" minimum standard, despite claiming that this "fair-share" view is unacceptable (because it means we only have to save a few of the drowning children). In other words, Singer considers the possible consequences of people being turned off by the strong argument, and thus softens it in order to (hopefully) produce better consequences in terms of utility. In making this move, his language even softens, from arguing about what our moral duties "are" to considerations of what we can morally "criticize." He says that in the interests of helping societal opinions on philanthropy move forward, "It may be best to refrain from criticizing those who achieve [only] the fair-share level. In moving our society's standards forward, we may have to progress one step at a time."³⁷

That is not to say that he abandons his strong argument and its conclusion. He still holds that the argument is sound, and thus the conclusion that we must give all we can still holds true. Yet he ends up paradoxically muzzling this strong utilitarian argument for the sake of greater overall utility.

³⁷ Singer, "What Should a Billionaire Give – and What Should You?"

The Fallacy of Philanthropic Logic

The second and third critiques come from philosopher Paul Gomberg's 2002 paper "The Fallacy of Philanthropy," and focus respectively on the general moral principle foundational to Singer's argument, and on the causes of poverty.³⁸

Concerning the former, Gomberg argues that Singer's argument suffers from an inductive problem in terms of the "general moral principle" upon which it is based. In his argument, Singer claims that based on scenarios such as rescuing a child drowning in a shallow pond, we can posit a general moral principle. This principle establishes a duty to sacrifice a small amount personal utility if by doing so we will save another's life (a great increase in utility). Gomberg critiques this claim, pointing out that such a moral principle doesn't exist in our society. He argues that what he calls "philanthropic" logic proceeds as follows:

A general moral principle is inferred from a particular imagined situation(s) where we agree about the right thing to do; then conclusions are drawn from that principle that imply a change in how we live. Thus, it is argued, a new moral obligation is implicit in the morality we already accept.³⁹

In Singer's case, this reasoning to a general principle begins with rescuing a child from drowning in a shallow pond, and from this example he derives the general moral principle: "If it is in our power to prevent something bad from happening, without thereby sacrificing anything of comparable moral importance, we ought, morally, to do it."

³⁸ Paul Gomberg, "The Fallacy of Philanthropy," *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*, 32.1 (March 2002): 29-65.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 31.

Gomberg agrees that one of our ethical norms is a “duty to rescue” when immediate action can be effective without dire consequences to the rescuer. Given this principle, we would find it ethically reprehensible for someone to walk by and not wade in to save the child. What he disagrees with, however, is Singer’s inductive move to draw out a general moral principle, from which we can then deduce a moral obligation to “rescue” the global poor. Singer thinks that if we accept that we must wade in and save the child, then we must also accept that our ethical norms and obligations are such that we must wade in and save the poor. Gomberg disagrees, arguing that just because we have a duty to rescue in individual (and extreme) circumstances, it does *not* follow that we are always obligated to prevent anything bad from happening if it will only cost us a little in terms of effort.

Gomberg finds the inductive move illegitimate precisely because Singer’s general moral principle is consequentialist-utilitarian, whereas our “duty to rescue in extreme circumstances” is not. Gomberg offers this illuminating example to make the force of the distinction clear:

[A girl named] Libby has been so impressed with the discussion of Singer in her Ethics class that she has decided to sell her one valuable prized possession, a pair of boots made by a famous artisan, to a collector who will pay her \$5,000 for them. Having also read [Peter] Unger, Libby believes that, by the very most conservative estimates, the \$5,000, given to UNICEF, will give twenty infants who would otherwise die the overwhelming probability of living to adulthood in good health and having productive lives. Libby puts on the boots for a last time (it takes several minutes to put them on and take them off), and, carrying a spare pair of shoes over her shoulder, walks to the collector’s house to sell them. But on the way she encounters a child in imminent danger of drowning in a shallow ornamental pond. If Libby wades in to rescue her, the boots will be spoiled and valueless.

The issue, as Gomberg points out, is that the consequentialist-utilitarian ethical norm that Singer draws out would dictate that Libby must let the child drown so as to not ruin the boots. This seems reprehensible, according to Gomberg, because we have a general “duty to rescue” moral principle that is *not* consequentialist-utilitarian. This moral principle would not allow Libby to let the child drown and defend herself by saying she was saving the boots in order to save twenty lives. According to our moral community, she would be violating her duty to rescue those in need; she *should* wade in and save the child. It seems then that Singer’s utilitarian-consequentialist argument dictates that Libby must let one child die, as the utility of saving one child is not as morally weighty as the utility of saving the boots, which will be sold to generate money that will save several children’s lives. Gomberg says that it doesn’t just “seem” this way; in fact, Singer himself begrudgingly admits that Libby should let the child drown: “Singer (in correspondence) bites the consequentialist bullet and says that while we would shudder at the sort of person who would walk past the child, she does the right thing.”⁴⁰

Thus his moral precept can dictate that a person should do something that we find absolutely grotesque: standing on the shore watching one child drown, all the while justifying this inaction because it will lead to twenty lives being saved. Clearly there is a problem here, and that is Gomberg’s criticism: Singer is wrong to inductively derive a general principle that says we must provide aid to others (as long as we don’t sacrifice anything of comparable moral importance) from individual instances where we are morally bound to rescue strangers in need. “Our current ethical culture requires rescue of

⁴⁰ Ibid., 45n20.

strangers in emergency. It does not require relief of the poor. We respond to the story of the endangered child because we feel bound by a relevant norm. It is wrong to infer, as the philanthropists do, a general value or principle from this norm; it is wrong to infer that we *must* accept a norm requiring relief to the poor.”⁴¹

The Causes of Poverty

The third critique of Singer’s argument (the second critique offered by Gomberg) is to claim that Singer’s argument makes the causes of global poverty irrelevant when ascribing a duty to all individuals. When establishing a duty to aid the drowning child, it doesn’t matter how the child got there, or what will happen if we save him/her; we simply have a duty to do so. Yet, according to Gomberg, that is a disanalogy when it comes to poverty. The causes and consequences are extremely relevant to our obligations (and thus ethical norms). Do we see that we caused the poverty? Whose ‘fault’ is it? Will my acting philanthropically actually make a difference? Knowing the answers to these questions will definitely affect where our philanthropic efforts, if any, would be concentrated. As he puts it:

Philanthropic logic asserts a duty to aid the world’s poor like our duty to rescue a child in danger of drowning, proceeding from the latter situation to a general principle and then applying that general principle to the problem of pervasive poverty and its effects. It argues that alleged differences between the two cases are morally irrelevant and that the duties to aid are similar. However, considerations of possible or probably long term consequences of aiding a particular person seem wildly irrelevant to our duty to rescue a child in danger of drowning while parallel speculations about the causes of poverty and the consequences of a particular response are relevant to the issue of whether and how to address poverty.⁴²

⁴¹ Ibid., 45.

⁴² Ibid., 40.

The causal issue comes into play here in two ways: one, we must be concerned with what consequences will be caused by our intervening philanthropically and trying to “save” the child drowning in poverty. Along these lines, some like Garrett Hardin could respond to Singer’s argument by claiming that helping the global poor through philanthropy would in fact cause great harm to our society if everyone donated. Hardin argues that if we imagine developed nations as “lifeboats” with limited capacity, providing aid to the poor (saving their lives by allowing the poor into our metaphorical lifeboats) would end up sinking the boats, and causing harm to all of us. Hardin’s concern is in many ways Malthusian: if we use philanthropy to keep the poor alive, it will end up harming society as a whole. On utilitarian terms, the potential for disaster outweighs the possible benefits to those who are saved.⁴³ Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, questions as to the causes of global poverty are paramount to any attempts to rectify the situation. In the case of one child, we need not be so concerned with what caused him to end up in the pond, but in terms of the larger issue of global poverty, we are hard-pressed to come up with an effective solution unless we take some effort to examine the causes.

In this way, there is a disanalogy between the drowning child and the child living in poverty: “Speculations about the causes of poverty and consequences of alternative responses are relevant to whether we should aid the victims of absolute poverty, but in our ethical culture parallel speculations about how the child [drowning in the pond] came to be in need of rescue or of the consequences of rescue are irrelevant to whether we must

⁴³ Cf. Garrett Hardin, “Lifeboat Ethics: The Case Against Helping the Global Poor,” *Psychology Today* 8, no. 4 (September 1974): 38-43. Hardin uses this metaphor against both philanthropy and allowing open immigration to developed countries by poor people.

rescue.”⁴⁴ Responding in the latter situation involves merely an adherence to a moral responsibility, regardless of causes or consequences. The case of the former is different, according to Gomberg; we should be asking questions about the causes of the poverty, and the consequences of whether or not our philanthropic actions would actually help solve the problem of poverty. He goes on to claim that philanthropic aid is actually counterproductive, and we would be better off seeking institutional reform. At best, philanthropy merely deflects attention and concern away from the real causal issues in terms of poverty. At worst, such aid can actually be counterproductive, unable to help people in developing nations rise out of poverty, and causing harm to the world as a whole. Thus, says Gomberg, Singer’s argument suffers severely from a problem of disanalogy, and a lack of concern for the causes of poverty.

Conclusion

In one sense, I find Singer’s argument very appealing, as its effectiveness lies in the simplicity of the diagnosis and treatment. Since he is able to quantify what is needed to help those who are in poverty, and what it would cost each individual, there is a certain “common-sense intuition” to which he appeals. Few would argue that they are unable to cough up a few meager dollars per day or week, especially in the face of such immense deprivations. As Richard Miller states, “Singer’s argument remains a vital presence because he seemed to describe a route by which virtually all of us, including people appalled by utilitarianism, would be forced by reflection on our own convictions and a

⁴⁴ Gomberg, 36-37.

plausible empirical hypothesis to embrace a radical moral imperative of global aid.”⁴⁵

Thus, it seems that having an obligation to aid the global poor is a good thing: the poor will benefit immensely through philanthropic aid, and it will only cost us very little (in terms of money and thus utility).

But, as I have argued above, Singer’s approach runs up against three specific critiques that I do not think he can overcome. First, he ends up caught in a paradox, as he wants to offer a strict utilitarian argument that is in practice quite demanding, but ends up softening it with a practical minimum standard that will perhaps be accepted by more individuals, but leaves him arguing against his utilitarian argument for utilitarian reasons. Secondly, his argument to induce the duty to aid the poor does not logically follow from our generally accepted duty to rescue, as Gomberg points out. This all leads into what I think is the insurmountable hurdle for Singer’s argument: efficacy, in relation to causes. There is a concern as to whether or not Singer’s focus on monetary/philanthropic aid will actually be effective. It is entirely possible that we may be able to generate enough money to meet the demands of his argument (in terms of the U.N. Millennium Development Goals). But will this money really end up solving the problem of global poverty? Singer is neglecting a key aspect of the problem of poverty: its causes. This is puzzling for a utilitarian, because utilitarianism as a moral theory is first and foremost concerned with what consequences a person’s actions will have.

While he clearly provides a practical approach to follow, such a focus on philanthropy doesn’t really shed any light on the causes of poverty around the world. Against this charge, Singer responds *very* briefly, saying only that while philanthropic aid

⁴⁵ Miller, 9.

may deflect attention away from institutional concerns, he is “open minded” about other approaches to poverty that may work better. And yet, he still feels his argument holds, and provides a very good/effective way to combat poverty.⁴⁶

The fact that Singer is unable to sufficiently answer Gomberg’s critique about the causes of poverty is a huge problem for his argument; we need to be asking questions about causes. An effective and morally compelling argument for aiding the global poor must have the issue of causality in mind if it is to offer a prescription for overcoming such causes. As we shall see in the next chapter, this issue ends up being at the forefront of the approach advocated by Thomas Pogge.

⁴⁶ See here Singer, *LYCS*, 35-36.

CHAPTER TWO

THOMAS POGGE AND AN APPEAL TO HUMAN RIGHTS

As I argued in the last chapter, Peter Singer's approach to poverty appears to run up against serious critiques to which he has no suitable answer. Moreover, despite Singer's persistence in putting forth his argument in the forty or so years since it first appeared, his appeal has not convinced as many people as he would have hoped to donate their surplus wealth to philanthropic organizations. Many critics of Singer rightly point out (as I discussed in the last chapter) that the causes of poverty are extremely important when trying to decide who has any moral responsibility or duty to act. Philosopher Jan Narveson, for instance, rejects Singer's proposals for precisely this reason. He argues that we *would* owe something (money) to the global poor if we were in any way causing their poverty; in other words, we would have a duty to pay reparations. However, he claims, we are *not* in any way causing them to be poor: "Our distant sufferers aren't so because we made them so. It could have been, to be sure; it just happens not to be."¹ Although he goes on to argue that it would be "nice" for individuals to contribute to poverty-relief efforts, we have no strict moral duty to do so, precisely because we in no way caused the impoverishment of these people. We have not harmed anyone, and according to our ordinary moral standards, we don't owe anything to people that we didn't harm.

¹ Jan Narveson, "We Don't Owe Them a Thing! A Tough-minded but Soft-hearted View of Aid to the Faraway Needy," *The Monist*, 86, no. 3 (2003): 420-421.

It is this issue that lies at the heart of philosopher Thomas Pogge's approach to global poverty. Pogge disagrees strongly with Narveson; we *are* directly harming the poor, he claims, and because of this demonstrable fact, we have a moral obligation to stop causing such harm. Rather than a duty to act (by donating money, as Singer argued), Pogge claims that we have a duty to stop acting. We must cease acting in ways that harm the poorest people of the world. His argument works to not only detail the global structures that perpetuate such harms, but also to examine the role that individual affluent citizens play in supporting these structures.

In this chapter I will examine Pogge's argument for the claim that we are in fact causing harm to the global poor, and as a result have a duty to refrain from continuing such harm. First, given that Pogge's argument draws explicitly upon a conception of human rights, I will provide a short sketch of the development of human rights from their origin in the "natural rights" of the Enlightenment to their modern-day solidification in the work of the United Nations. Then I will detail Pogge's argument that we are causing the harms of global poverty, and what that fact implies for individuals living in affluent societies. Lastly, I will examine some criticisms of Pogge's position, and argue that these objections cast serious doubt on Pogge's argument.

The Origins of "Human Rights"

John Locke and Natural Rights

The modern approach to human rights has its genesis in the Enlightenment concept of natural rights. One of the most famous works articulating this position is John

Locke's 17th century *Second Treatise of Government*.² Locke argues that individuals are imbued with the natural rights of "perfect freedom" and "equality" in virtue of being products of divine creation. These natural rights derive from the concept of the "law of nature," which Locke argues "obliges every one: and reason, which is that law, teaches all mankind, who will but consult it, that being all *equal and independent*, no one ought to harm another in his life, health, liberty, or possessions...for men being all the workmanship of one omnipotent and infinitely wise Maker."³

Thus Locke claims that individuals, as a result of being created by God, are possessors of the rights noted above, which are essentially rights of non-interference. Within the state of nature, each individual has (equally) the right of freedom in his personal life and property. Our reason is a faculty by which we can apprehend the law of nature, which dictates that no one may interfere with the natural rights of another individual person.

In the state of nature, if someone does violate another's rights, the person harmed has a right to punish the offender. When we move from this state towards forming a civil government, Locke argues, we voluntarily forfeit our rights of punishment, while keeping intact our natural rights of freedom and equality. We still maintain a right to act as we see fit and be treated the same as other people, so long as we do not violate the rights of others. These rights are considered inalienable; they apply to individuals specifically, and even when we form a government, we do not forfeit these specific rights.

² Note that Locke's work is not necessarily the first appearance of such a position, but his work typifies the early social/moral reasoning based on the existence of natural rights.

³ John Locke, *Second Treatise of Government* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1980), 8.

Modern Appearance of Human Rights

While the language of rights was discarded by utilitarians in the 19th century, it was resurrected in the 20th century as an attempt to convince people around the globe that there is some interpersonal standard that every individual can invoke in virtue of his humanity. In the 20th century, a concept of universal “rights” emerged that detached the idea of “natural” from rights, and replaced it with “human.” Rather than being grounded in the natural law bestowed by God, “human” rights are based on the premise that each individual human being possesses them solely in virtue of being a member of the human community.

Human rights have come to play an important role in our moral discourse, insofar as they force individuals to reflect upon interactions with others, and the claims that we can make on our fellow human beings (and institutions). According to the concept of human rights, there are certain things that individuals, qua human beings, require, and there are corresponding duties (placed somewhere, either on individuals or governments) to provide these things.

In his influential 1979 essay “The Nature and Value of Rights,” Joel Feinberg argues for the necessity of a conception of human rights to serve as a basis for individual human self-respect. Feinberg asks the reader to imagine a fictional place called “Nowheresville,” a place where individuals exist but have no rights. He points out that this place is problematic, because individuals have no standard by which they can make claims on other people. In order for people to get their “due” (which he sees as a share of basic goods), they need to be able to make claims on other people in relation to these

“due” goods. Without a conception of human rights, there is no standard by which we can generate such claims. Rights, he states, are things that are “claimed, demanded, affirmed, insisted upon...they are especially sturdy objects to ‘stand upon.’”⁴ Thus Feinberg argues that human rights are an integral part of our nature:

[Rights are] connected in a way with the customary rhetoric about what it is to be a human being. Having rights enables us to ‘stand up like men’, to look others in the eye, and to feel in some fundamental way the equal of anyone. To think of oneself as the holder of rights is not to be unduly but properly proud.⁵

Thus Feinberg holds that rights are an aspect of being fully human, insofar as they are tools that we can use to assert our humanity to other people (or have asserted on our behalf). Rights give us an avenue to equalize ourselves with others and make claims upon them.

A particularly important benchmark in establishing this modern conception of human rights is the United Nations’ Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). In the wake of the atrocities of World War II, the fledgling U.N. wanted to create some standard that could be used to prevent such horrors from recurring. The result of this effort was the UDHR, which attempted to codify certain rights that all humans possess, and create some minimal standards of treatment for human beings throughout the world.

In developing this document, the politics of the time came into play. Because of Cold War tensions between the West and the Communist countries, there was a division in the types of rights that were stressed as critical for inclusion in the UDHR. The Western countries focused in on what are called “first-generation” or “negative” political

⁴ Joel Feinberg, “The Nature and Value of Rights,” in *Rights, Justice, and the Bounds of Liberty* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1980), 151.

⁵ Ibid.

rights, based on individual liberties and the freedom/autonomy of the individual person.⁶

The Communist countries pushed for what are referred to as “second-generation” or “positive” rights, economic rights that are “intended to provide individuals with protection against deprivation of the basic material necessities of life.”⁷ Given the background politics, these two types of rights (negative and positive, political and economic) were seen as distinct within the debate (and the UDHR document it produced).

As I have pointed out, the Lockean notion of rights was focused on the (negative) rights of non-interference. During the development of the UDHR, there was a push for (positive) economic rights, which guaranteed specific goods to individuals, rather than simply guaranteeing political autonomy. At the same time, the Western interpretation of the document gave precedence to the negative rights focused on liberty and political freedoms; economic rights were seen to be secondary. This is not to say that they were ignored, but working to guarantee negative rights was considered primary by Western countries, and devoting resources to positive (economic) rights was secondary.

Henry Shue and the Negative/Positive Rights Distinction

In his 1996 book *Basic Rights* Henry Shue argues that this negative/positive distinction is unfounded, and claims that both kinds of rights entail both negative and positive actions.⁸ Shue first points out the necessary link between rights that individuals have and duties that are incumbent upon outside individuals or institutions to fulfill.

⁶ The language of ‘negative’ and ‘positive’ rights was not used at the time the document was created; the focus was on rights of political and personal autonomy versus economic rights (and thus highlighted the conflict between Western and Communist nations).

⁷ Morton Winston, “Understanding Human Rights,” in *The Philosophy of Human Rights* (California: Wadsworth, 1989), 18.

⁸ Henry Shue, *Basic Rights* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1996).

Shue claims that rights in and of themselves are not the final objects that individuals want to possess, but rather that individuals want the *goods* or *substance* of the right; a person does not enjoy a right to security in and of itself, rather he enjoys the ‘good’ of being secure by having a right to security. Individuals do not want a right to clean water; they want the clean water itself. Furthermore, the enjoyment of these goods needs to be socially guaranteed, meaning that others are bound to make arrangements so that I will be able to enjoy the substance of my right. Take for example a right to security: having or asserting such a right entails that some outside entity, perhaps (and most likely) a government, needs to make certain arrangements so that I may enjoy the good of being secure as a result of my having a right to security. Thus Shue makes the critical assertion that having a right “involves a rationally justified demand for social guarantees against standard threats [which] means, in effect, that the relevant other people have a duty to create, if they do not exist, or if they do, to preserve effective institutions for the enjoyment of what people have rights to enjoy.”⁹

Shue argues that “negative rights” and “positive rights” both entail positive and negative actions; hence, there are no purely positive or purely negative rights. Negative rights appear to have a feature of non-interference, meaning that individuals simply have a duty to leave others alone. Positive rights, on the other hand, involve some activity on the part of those with the duty, meaning that they must act to provide the good of a right (such as providing food to those with a right to subsistence). Shue lays out this distinction as follows:

⁹ Ibid., 17.

The basic idea behind the general suggestion that there are positive rights and negative rights seems to have been that one kind of rights (the positive ones) require other people to act positively – to ‘do something’ – whereas another kind of rights (the negative ones) require other people merely to refrain from acting in certain ways – to do nothing that violates the rights.¹⁰

However, this distinction between negative and positive rights breaks down when we consider the practical implications of respecting these rights. While it is true that, by refraining from acting in a way that would interfere with someone’s liberty, we are respecting his right to security/non-interference, “It is impossible *to protect* anyone’s rights to physical security without taking, or making payments toward the taking of, a wide range of positive actions.”¹¹ In order to actually fulfill our duty to protect someone’s right to security, we need to take positive actions, such as creating laws, hiring police forces, etc. These are positive, active attempts to provide viable guarantees for the security of individuals within a society against reasonably foreseeable threats. People, he claims, want to feel reasonably secure, and not just feel “the cold comfort of knowing that the occasional criminal is punished after someone’s security has already been violated.”¹² No society (or the members thereof) operates solely under a bare right to non-interference.¹³

Thus a negative right of security necessarily involves positive action on the part of an outside source. While the “core” of the right remains negative (as it prescribes a

¹⁰ Ibid., 36.

¹¹ Ibid., 37.

¹² Ibid., 38.

¹³ Shue argues that even John Stuart Mill recognized that citizens want their rights actively protected. He quotes Mill from *Utilitarianism*: “To have a right, then, is, I conceive, to have something which society ought to defend me in the possession of” (193n9).

sense of non-interference), this core says nothing about the social protections that must be actively (read: positively) instituted and upheld. Conversely, in the case of a positive right like subsistence, we may not be required to actively provide food for the poor, but may instead have a negative duty to not interfere in their obtaining and consuming it:

It is...quite clear that the honoring of subsistence rights may often in no way involve transferring commodities to people, but may instead involve preventing people's being deprived of the commodities or the means to grow, make, or buy the commodities. [But] preventing such deprivations will indeed require what can be called positive actions, especially protective and self-protective actions.¹⁴

Shue argues that the supposed “hard and fast” distinction between negative and positive rights is at least blurred, if not altogether non-existent. In order to fulfill a positive duty, one may have to refrain from acting, and in order to fulfill a negative duty, one may have to actually perform some action. Shue's argument is clearly accepted and utilized by Thomas Pogge, as he tries to connect the positive rights of the poor to the negative duties that he says individual affluent citizens have.¹⁵

Thomas Pogge and our Negative Duties

In my discussion of his utilitarian argument, I pointed out that Peter Singer attempts to ground a duty for assisting/rescuing the global poor, based on a generally accepted moral principle that he derives from thinking about our moral response to strangers in emergencies. While Singer's argument does not invoke human rights, the duty that he defends can be seen as a positive duty; it requires an individual to actively do

¹⁴ Ibid., 51.

¹⁵ Shue's argument focuses on the character of rights, and he claims that the distinction between “negative rights” and “positive rights” does not exist. This is distinct from any claim about negative duties and positive duties. Thomas Pogge accepts Shue's conclusion, but moves on to utilize the distinction between the two kinds of duties, which he thinks holds true, and is philosophically important.

something about global poverty. Specifically, she needs to step in and give monetary aid to the poor. As we have seen, however, Singer's approach is beset with a multitude of philosophical problems (detailed in Chapter One).

But what about changing course and focusing on negative duties, rather than positive ones? Instead of trying to convince people that they need to do something, what about convincing them that they need to stop doing something? Such an attempt is made by Thomas Pogge in his 2002 book *World Poverty and Human Rights*.¹⁶ Pogge recognizes that a standard move when confronted with a picture like the one Singer paints is to quickly claim innocence. If I don't feel that I am causing the problems of global poverty, then I do not have to provide the solution, especially if it involves donating money. (Narveson's argument noted at the beginning of this chapter makes this point.) This escape route is readily available and utilized, says Pogge, because Singer's arguments rest on mandating specific positive actions that individuals and governments must take, based solely on the needs of others.

Pogge argues for a different approach, one which works from the concept of negative duties. Rather than claiming that individuals have a positive duty to act (by giving aid), he argues that we in fact have a negative duty to refrain from acting. Focusing specifically on the causes of global poverty, he argues that Western nations are actively promoting a global economic and political order that directly contributes to the

¹⁶ Thomas Pogge, *World Poverty and Human Rights* (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2002). In what follows I will be incorporating not only this work, but also several other articles of his that further clarify and refine his argument: selections from his anthology *Politics as Usual* (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2010), and his articles "Real World Justice," *The Journal of Ethics* 9 (2005): 29-53, and "Human Rights and Human Responsibilities," in *Global Justice and Transnational Politics*, Eds. Pablo De Greiff and Ciaran Cronin (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press 2002), 151-196.

impoverishment of billions of people around the globe. Given this fact, he says we must stop imposing these policies. This negative duty falls not only on the shoulders of Western leaders and policy-makers, but also on individual citizens of those countries.

An Institutional Framework for Human Rights

Pogge begins his argument by establishing just how horrific the realities of global poverty are. In addition to the image cited in the introduction to this dissertation, Pogge offers three more disquieting figures:

In 2000 the bottom half of the world's population owned 1.1% of all global wealth, while the top 10% of the population owned 85.1%.¹⁷

In terms of Purchasing Power Parity (PPP), there are 1.2 million people living in absolute poverty, most of whom are living on about \$338 (U.S. dollars) per year.¹⁸

If the number of deaths as a result of poverty-related causes was shared proportionally amongst all countries (by population), severe poverty would kill 16,500 Americans per week. Each year, 15 times as many US citizens would die of poverty-related causes as were lost in the entire Vietnam War.¹⁹

In the face of these grotesque realities, Pogge does not try to establish (as Singer did) a duty to provide monetary aid to these impoverished people. Instead, he wants to take a step backwards and examine the causes of such realities. Given these causes, he argues that we (individual Western citizens) *do* in fact have a duty, but it is not Singer's utilitarian duty to donate money.

¹⁷ *Politics as Usual*, 13 (Hereafter *PAU*).

¹⁸ This number deserves a second of reflection; imagine trying to survive in the United States on only \$338 per year. See *World Poverty and Human Rights*, 97 (Hereafter *WPHR*) for Pogge's specific calculation of this figure.

¹⁹ *WPHR*, 98.

Pogge begins his examination by arguing that the material deprivations that comprise the conditions of absolute poverty are in fact a violation of those individuals' human rights. By "human rights," Pogge refers to what he sees as a basic facet of our shared human existence; rights are moral precepts that apply to us solely in virtue of our humanity. More broadly, he states that "Human rights are...to govern how all of us together ought to design the basic rules of our common life."²⁰ Pogge offers six particular elements of human rights, which he claims are generally uncontroversial:

First, human rights express *ultimate* moral concerns: agents have a moral duty to respect human rights, a duty that does not derive from a more general moral duty to comply with national or international laws...Second, human rights express *weighty* moral concerns, which normally override other normative considerations. Third, these moral concerns are focused on *human beings*, as all of them and they alone have human rights and the special moral status associated therewith. Fourth, with respect to these moral concerns, *all* human beings have *equal status*: They have exactly the same human rights, and the moral significance of these rights and of their fulfillment does not vary with whose human rights are at stake. Fifth, human rights express moral concerns whose validity is *unrestricted*, that is, they are conceived as binding on all human agents irrespective of their particular epoch, culture, religion, moral tradition, or philosophy. Sixth, these moral concerns are *broadly sharable*, that is, capable of being understood and appreciated by persons from different epochs and cultures as well as by adherents of a variety of different religions, moral traditions, and philosophies.²¹

Pogge argues that human rights are recognized as being applicable to all human beings, and correlatively they establish binding duties upon certain other parties. That is to say, rights are necessarily coupled with duties. If one person has a human right to a certain good, then there is a responsibility placed upon some other party in regards to this right. If I have a right to clean water, for example, then some other party has a duty

²⁰ Ibid., 47.

²¹ Thomas Pogge, "Human Rights and Human Responsibilities," *Global Justice and Transnational Politics*, 159 (Hereafter HR).

placed upon him, either to provide such water for me, or to refrain from acting in such a way as to interfere with my ability to obtain clean water (an important distinction to which I will return shortly). As such, my human right is only fulfilled when I have secure access to the “good” upon which my right is focused, as Shue argues above. Merely having a moral or legally instantiated right to clean water means nothing if I am not able to actually obtain said clean water (the “good” of the right).

In the case of the global poor, Pogge argues that there is what he calls a “basic” human right to subsistence: a minimal level of food, clean water, and shelter to which all human beings are entitled.²² In human rights terms, then, if certain people’s poverty is in some way due to a violation of their basic human rights, it then follows that some party has a correlative duty. But this brings up the question of exactly *who* or *what* has a duty, and what they must do or not do as a result.

To answer this question, Pogge draws a distinction between what he calls an “interactional” understanding of human rights and an “institutional” one. The former understanding posits human rights as claims one individual makes upon another, without presupposing the existence of social institutions. Thus any violation of a human right can be traced back to individual wrongdoers in individual personal interactions. In some cases, this picture of human rights and duties appears to function reasonably well; individual instances of torture or abuse can be understood in terms of individual interactions. Yet in terms of global poverty, such violations of basic rights don’t fit an interactional picture. It is extremely difficult to point out one particular interaction between persons that can be considered to constitute the exact cause of the violation of a

²² Here he is explicitly following the lead of the UDHR and its focus on “socioeconomic rights.”

poor person's basic human rights.²³ Thus it appears that an interactional understanding leaves out a great deal of what we often describe as violations of basic human rights.

Because of these deficiencies Pogge endorses the second option: an "institutional" understanding of human rights. This understanding takes into account the relational framework of our globalized world, and the coercive effects that governmental, economic, and social institutions can have on individual human beings. In essence, the rules, umpires, and owners of the political and economic game have a direct hand in how well the rights of individual "players" (by this I mean human beings) are protected and promoted. Pogge argues that "We should conceive human rights primarily as claims on coercive social institutions and secondarily as claims against those who uphold such institutions. Such an *institutional* understanding contrasts with an *interactional* one, which presents human rights as placing the treatment of human beings under certain constraints that do not presuppose the existence of social institutions."²⁴

Notice that this institutional understanding works on two (related) levels: on the one hand, social institutions are responsible for any violations of individuals' human rights that may occur. At the same time, those institutions operate through the actions of individual people who uphold, design, and carry out such institutions; the institutions don't just spring out of the ground, so to speak, nor do they operate without the actions of

²³ This is a point clearly made by David Ingram in his paper "Of Sweatshops and Subsistence: Habermas on Human Rights." Ingram's main example of a rights violation unincorporated by an interactional understanding is sweatshops. While it is true that there are individual interactions that directly violate women's rights (managers who keep women chained to machines, deny restroom breaks, etc.), these interactions do not sufficiently capture the rights violations. It is clear that the threats posed to the workers' human rights come from an economic structure that encourages low-wage work, a patriarchal structure that suppresses women, and other different, non-interactional sources. Cf. David Ingram, "Of Sweatshops and Subsistence: Habermas on Human Rights," *Ethics and Global Politics* 2, no. 3 (2009), 198.

²⁴ Pogge, *WPHR*, 44-45.

individual agents. Thus these individuals *also* have duties to uphold human rights, and these duties run parallel to those of the institutions to which they are connected. Pogge's institutional understanding is well summed up by the following claim:

I understand human rights...primarily as weighty moral claims on social institutions. An institutional order is human-rights violating when it foreseeably gives rise to greater insecurity in access to the objects of human rights (physical integrity, freedom of movement, adequate nutrition, etc.) than would be reasonably avoidable through an alternative feasible institutional design. Moral claims *on* social institutions are also, indirectly, moral claims *against* those who participate in designing and upholding these social institutions: Such agents, too, are violating human rights by imposing an institutional order under which access to the objects of human rights is foreseeably and avoidably insecure for some or all participants.²⁵

Negative and Positive Duties

Pogge thus establishes his understanding of human rights as institutional, meaning that duties are placed on institutions and the individuals who uphold them. He then draws another important distinction: between positive and negative duties. A positive duty means that, faced with a violation of a human right, one has to *do* something to stop or correct the violation. Take for instance the example of clean water that I used above: in this example, a positive duty would involve having a moral obligation to actively do something in order to provide me with clean water (buying me bottled water, helping to dig a well, etc.). On the other hand, a negative duty means that one only has to *refrain* from acting in such a way as to interfere with my ability to obtain the good of the right. Thus in the example, someone with only a negative duty regarding my water only has to refrain from acting (perhaps by not dumping pollutants into my water supply).

²⁵ Thomas Pogge, "Real World Justice," *The Journal of Ethics* 9 (2005): 43 (Hereafter RWJ).

With this negative/positive duties distinction in place, Pogge then makes a crucial move to focus not on positive duties, but rather on negative duties. He first offers up a recapitulation of Singer's utilitarian position:

One might argue that the distinction between causing poverty and failing to reduce it has little or no moral importance. Allowing hunger to kill people whom one could easily save, even mere foreigners, is morally on a par with killing them or at any rate little better. At least this is true for economic institutions: What matters for the moral assessment of an economic order under which many are starving is whether there is a feasible institutional alternative under which such starvation would not occur. It does not matter, or does not matter much, in what kind of causal relation the relevant economic order stands to the starvation in question.²⁶

But Pogge disagrees with this position (Singer's), claiming instead that:

I reject such heavily recipient-oriented approaches ... The distinction between causing poverty and merely failing to reduce it is morally significant. And I grant at least for argument's sake that, notwithstanding the enormous complexity of modern economic interaction, such a distinction can be applied, at least roughly, to the global order. My argument conceives, then both human rights and justice as involving solely negative duties: specific minimal constraints – more minimal in the case of human rights – on what harms persons may inflict upon others.²⁷

This focus solely on negative duties taps into one of the central tenets of our common shared morality: that we are morally obligated not to violate the rights other human beings, regardless of whatever we may gain as a result. Thus Pogge does not stand outside of our common morality, or challenge the way in which morality is generally conceived, but instead he draws from this basic moral precept a logical conclusion. He says his view is “motivated by the belief that negative...moral duties are more stringent than positive ones. For example, the duty not to assault people is more stringent than the duty to prevent such assaults by others. And, having assaulted another,

²⁶ *WPHR*, 13.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

the attacker has more reason to ensure that his victim's injuries are treated than a bystander would."²⁸ Thus rather than having a duty to do anything, negative duties involve having a moral responsibility to refrain from acting in a way that interferes with a person's human rights.

It should be noted that Pogge does not disavow the existence of positive duties altogether; rather, he sets this question aside and instead focuses only on negative duties. He argues that there currently is a pervasive assumption among human rights theorists that such human rights as a freedom from poverty must entail correlative positive duties: people must have to do something in order to help those in poverty.²⁹ But most people in

²⁸ RWJ, 34.

²⁹ One such approach (although it diverges from a human rights paradigm) that advocates for positive action, and that has garnered significant attention over the last fifteen years or so, is the capabilities approach, developed and championed by Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum. The argument from capabilities theorists is that a person who lives in poverty is unable to meet her own needs, insofar as she is not able to develop herself and her live into one wherein she can flourish as a human being. In *Development as Freedom*, Amartya Sen claims that any attempt to aid the global poor must focus on the person's ability to not only have access to primary goods, but also to be able to convert those primary goods into the person's ability to promote their own ends. Thus he states: "A person's 'capability' refers to the alternative combinations of functionings that are feasible for her to achieve. Capability is thus a kind of freedom: the substantive freedom to achieve alternative functioning combinations." (*Development as Freedom*, 75.) There is a focus not just on a negative freedom of non-interference, but rather on the actual positive abilities of an individual person to develop herself according to her desired ends.

Sen argues that such capabilities are developed or hindered in a variety of ways, not merely in virtue of a lack of income. Merely expanding the Gross National Product of a country may do little to actually improve the day-to-day lives of its citizens. Our human lives are affected by a myriad of factors, and a deficiency in such areas may not always be compensated for by an increase in wealth. In practical terms, Sen argues that basic justice demands that we promote these capabilities of the poor, insofar as we must act to provide aid in ways that will allow a poor person to develop her abilities to flourish and lead a life according to her own conception of the good.

Furthering Sen's philosophical argument in terms of practical considerations, Martha Nussbaum bolsters the capabilities position by advancing a specific list of human capabilities. In her work *Women and Human Development*, Nussbaum claims that these capabilities comprise "a bare minimum of what respect for human dignity requires." (*Women and Human Development*, 5.) In order for human beings to lead a life that is in any way meaningful (from the standpoint of 'humanity'), they need to be able to reach a certain threshold level in relation to specific aspects of their humanity, such as life, bodily health, bodily integrity, or control over one's environment. Without reaching the threshold of these capabilities, leading a meaningful life that can be called 'human' is practically impossible.

Thus both Sen and Nussbaum argue that the capabilities approach is therefore well-attuned to the diversity of human needs, and the ways in which different situations around the world affect poor people in

the U.S. and other affluent countries don't feel that they have a positive duty to end severe global poverty.³⁰ In fact, Pogge generally agrees with this view, or at least, for purposes of discussion, accepts it; he will not claim that we must actively do something to fulfill any positive duty to the global poor.

But this does not mean that we, the people of the developed West, are let entirely off the hook. According to Pogge, our duties are strictly negative; we have a duty to refrain from violating the rights of other human beings. If, for instance, we have an institutional order that promotes and practices torture, this clearly violates the human rights of those individuals who are tortured. This institutional order is thus guilty of violating a negative duty—and those individuals who put in place or support this institutional order are equally culpable. It is here that Pogge's argument will hone in on the average person living in developed nations. He sees all of us as supporting coercive global institutions that cause rights violations, and thus he sees us as directly implicated in causing these violations of our negative duties.

How We are Harming the Poor

But even if one accepts Pogge's institutional understanding of human rights, as well as the existence of negative duties, this may not mean that we have to do anything.

different ways. Cf. Amartya Sen, *Development as Freedom* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), Amartya Sen, "The Concept of Development," in *Global Ethics*, eds. Thomas Pogge and Keith Horton (St. Paul, MN: Paragon House, 2008), 157-180, and also Martha Nussbaum, *Women and Human Development* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

³⁰ See here *PAU*, 28, and *WPHR*, 10. This can clearly be seen in the haste of the U.S. government to refuse to sign several international statements and protocols asserting duties upon affluent countries to provide aid to developing peoples, such as the "Rome Declaration" and the U.N.'s "International Covenant on Social, Economic, and Cultural Rights." Even when they do sign on, the U.S. government has been quick to issue "interpretive statements" claiming that such agreements do not give rise to any binding international obligations.

Can't we just say that the human rights violations of global poverty are the fault of national institutions in those far-away countries? We aren't doing anything to violate our duties; we are just innocent bystanders. We aren't the ones causing such grotesque human rights abuses.

Pogge vehemently disagrees. On his view, we *are* causing the human rights violations of the poor around the world. As he puts it, "What I challenge is a common factual claim: that we are not harming the poor, that the developed countries and the global economic order they sustain are not substantial contributors to life-threatening poverty suffered by billions in the developing world."³¹ Through the global institutional framework (political, economic, and social), we are violating our negative duties by inflicting direct harms upon the poorest people of the world. Again, this isn't merely a condemnation of our institutions and bureaucrats, but also an indictment of the average Western citizen who supports and benefits from these structures and institutions.

By arguing that we are causing such rights violations, Pogge is rejecting what he refers to as "explanatory nationalism," the view that the causes of poverty in poor countries can be explained entirely with reference to national factors: corrupt governments, weak infrastructure, cultural deficiencies, etc.³² In effect, whatever problems nations (and their people) have are solely a result of their own actions, not the actions of other nations/peoples or the global economy.

³¹ *WPHR*, 25.

³² At *PAU*, 32, Pogge points to Rawls in *The Law of Peoples* as someone who puts forth this position. Pogge also argues that the capabilities argument falls prey to this temptation of explanatory nationalism: "Look at the work of developmental economists, from Amartya Sen to the Chicago School, which is overwhelmingly focused on relating the persistence of severe poverty to local causes – bad governance, sexist culture, geography, and much else – while leaving unstudied the huge impact of the global economic order on the incidence of poverty worldwide." Cf. Pogge, *RWJ*, 30.

In rejecting explanatory nationalism, Pogge argues that in today's global economy there is a great deal of interplay among different governmental and other institutions, such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank, and large multinational corporations. These various entities combine and collude in a multitude of ways to set policies and goals that have a great effect on the lives of individual people around the world. The policies and actions of a given institution can and do affect people around the globe. Individual countries are not islands, wherein individual peoples' lives are only affected and shaped by the actions of the government/institutions under which they live.

Pogge argues to the contrary: our global economic order causes harm to the poor in a variety of ways, both direct and indirect. The direct harms come through the adoption of economic protectionist measures by developed nations such as the United States, while, at the same time, pressuring developing nations to refrain from adopting similar policies. We insist on protecting prices and incomes within our own nation by maintaining high tariffs on imports, while leaning on developing nations to eradicate their own tariffs.³³ This allows our domestic industrial producers to be shielded against international competition, and at the same time allows markets in developing countries to be flooded with the goods that we produce. Domestic producers abroad can't compete with such cheap imports, crippling their ability to stay afloat. In addition, we also subsidize our agriculture, which allows our producers to be insulated from the international economic climate, while at the same time leaving developing nations' farmers out in the cold to face plummeting market prices. In general, says Pogge, his

³³ While it is true that the United States' membership in the W.T.O. has forced us to drop most of these high tariffs, we have still maintained some tariffs, many of which are four times as high as they are in other countries. Cf. *WPHR*, 17.

complaint against these policies “is not that it opens markets too much, but that it opens *our* markets *too little* and thereby gains for us the benefits of free trade while withholding them from the global poor.”³⁴ We push developing nations to leave their own markets open to any competition without having to put ourselves at an equal level (in terms of market risk and price fluctuations). As such, these policies are causing a direct harm to those people living in poverty around the world.

Pogge goes further, arguing that we are also upholding an order that indirectly causes poverty, through the incentives it offers rulers of developing nations. Here he points to two specific privileges that the world’s economic apparatus bestows upon the ruler of any country: a *resource* privilege, and a *borrowing* privilege. The resource privilege allows any de facto ruler of a country the power to sell their country’s natural resources to other countries (or corporations). Thus no matter how a ruler came into power, or how autocratic or oppressive his regime is, he is internationally recognized as having the authority to sell natural resources to the highest bidder. Here Pogge says there is a clear disconnect between this standard and the ones to which we hold our own national economic order: It definitely matters within our nation how a person got his hands on the diamond necklace he is selling. If he robbed or killed someone to get it, we don’t see him as having a valid claim of ownership over that property. And yet, we allow ruling juntas and despots to sell off the spoils of their crimes, so to speak. This is of clear benefit to Western nations, as we are able to purchase the natural resources we want. Given this privilege, there is a long line of people eager to get power, who will keep these supplies flowing for the right price. As Pogge caustically remarks, we hungrily purchase

³⁴ Ibid., 19.

oil from despots in extremely poor countries, and then turn around and “lavish condescending pity” upon those people for not being able to govern themselves democratically.³⁵

Similarly, the borrowing privilege allows those same de facto rulers to borrow money from the IMF/World Bank and from private lenders for their country to use. Moreover, once the money has been transferred, we hold the debt as binding upon the country itself, even if the ruler is thrown from power. Thus a ruler can come to power through a coup and quickly borrow vast sums of money in the name of his country through the international financial markets; even if he ends up thrown from power soon after, our loan agencies hold the successor governments as responsible to pay back the debts racked up by their predecessor.³⁶

As Pogge points out, these two privileges provide an incredible incentive for people to attempt coups and political takeovers in developing countries. If the takeover is successful, the new rulers are granted the right to sell off resources and borrow money, which they can use to solidify their power and punish their enemies. This indirectly creates a climate of perennial instability and violence in developing countries, which often leaves infrastructure, social welfare, and democracy utterly neglected.³⁷

³⁵ Ibid., 142.

³⁶ See *PAU*, 47-50 and *RWJ*, 51 here. Pogge points to the Rwandan government during the genocide of the mid-1990s as a particularly egregious example: they borrowed vast sums to purchase the weapons which they used to massacre millions of innocent Tutsis. After the war was over, the new government was held responsible for paying back the debts of the former genocidal government.

³⁷ At *WPHR*, 112-113, Pogge refers to the so-called “Dutch Disease,” where the more resource-rich a country is (such as the former colonies of the 19th-century colonial powers), the lower their rates of economic growth and democracy, and the higher their rates of poverty and violence.

Thus the international economic policies of the world, which are set up by the affluent countries, are doing three main things (either directly or indirectly) to the poor that are morally indefensible: 1. *Impoverishing*, because “Their exercise often dispossesses a country’s people who are excluded from political participation as well as from the benefits of their government’s borrowing or resource sales” 2. *Oppressing*, because “They often give illegitimate rulers access to the funds they need to keep themselves in power,” and 3. *Disrupting*, because “They provide strong incentives toward the undemocratic acquisition and exercise of political power, resulting in the kinds of coups and civil wars that are so common in countries with a large resource sector.”³⁸

It should be noted that Pogge does not discount local factors in assessing the causes of global poverty. He acknowledges that there is a significant interplay between national and international factors. He utilizes an analogy with students and teaching to make this point: “There may be great variations in the performance of students in one class. These must be due to student-specific factors. Still, it does not follow that these ‘local’ factors fully explain the performance of a class. Teacher and classroom quality, teaching times, reading materials, libraries, and other ‘global’ factors may also play an important role.”³⁹ Neither set of factors is “causally inert,” lying dormant while the other works to impoverish people; both are constantly at work, and this interaction ends up multiplying the negative effects of the other. So “the question is not what are we doing to

³⁸ PAU, 18-19.

³⁹ Ibid., 33.

the developing countries? The crucial question is what are we and the rulers and elites of the developing countries *together* doing to their impoverished populations?”⁴⁰

Thus Pogge argues that we are causally implicated in the impoverishment of millions of people around the globe, through both direct actions/policies and the upholding of an economic order wherein we perpetuate a climate of instability and harm. This is in clear violation of our negative duty not to violate the rights of others. Hence, we must stop violating the rights of the poor: we must cease our protectionist policies, and revoke the resource and borrowing privileges in the international arena. But how can we do this? And more importantly for my purposes here, *who* has to do this? As I mentioned above, it is not just officials and elites who have a negative moral duty to cease such policies; it also falls upon all of us individual citizens of developed nations.

According to Pogge:

For the hope that these countries will, from the inside, democratize themselves and abolish the worst poverty and oppression is entirely naïve as long as the institutional context of these countries continues to favor so strongly the emergence and endurance of brutal and corrupt elites. *The primary responsibility for this institutional context, for the prevailing global order, lies with the governments and citizens of the wealthy countries, because we maintain this order, with at least latent coercion, and because we, and only we, could relatively easily reform it.*⁴¹

The Individual Ramifications of our Negative Duties

Pogge notes that many individual citizens will want to respond by saying that *they* aren't doing anything wrong, because they don't hold positions of power in government or the economic community. The average American person, they say, can't be held

⁴⁰ WPHR, 22-23.

⁴¹ HR, 175, emphasis mine.

responsible. Pogge acknowledges that this may be the case, if the human rights violations in question are individual cases that cannot reasonably be avoided through appropriate institutional protections. But we *are* implicated when we are upholding institutions that repeatedly and systematically cause human rights abuses, as the current international economic order does. It's not that we have sporadic instances of people being tortured or murdered; the economic climate is such that we are continually impoverishing people and driving them further and further into abject poverty, making us complicit in the deaths of millions of people per year.

Simply put, we are responsible for the global order that our representatives perpetuate. Pursuant to that responsibility, we have an overarching negative duty to make sure that such an order does not violate the human rights of others, and in fact, that's exactly what we are allowing to happen. Pogge points out that "These governments are elected by us, responsive to our interests and preferences, acting in our name and in ways that benefit us. This buck stops with us."⁴² Here he draws an analogy between the oversight and thoughtlessness of the average Westerner and the "blissful ignorance" of German citizens during the Nazi regime's extermination of the Jews during World War II: the German citizens were morally implicated in the crimes of the Nazis, not because they actively participated (most did not), but because they did nothing to stop those crimes, or even to reflect on their moral responsibilities. Just because those people did not take the time to consider what they should be doing to stop the atrocities carried out in their name, we do not absolve them of neglecting their moral duties. In fact, Pogge says, their lack of thinking about their moral responsibilities only exhibits the depth of

⁴² *WPHR*, 21.

their moral failing. They failed in their negative moral duty not to violate others' rights, and in the same way, so are we. Despite the shock value of this analogy, Pogge assures us that:

The point of this parallel is not...to liken our conduct to that of Nazi sympathizers. The common point is thoughtlessness. Poverty so extensive and severe as to cause 18 million deaths a year requires a reflective moral response from each and every one of us. It requires that we morally situate ourselves in respect to it and choose how to act or fail to act in the face of it.⁴³

Faced with the abject poverty and misery into which our international economic institutions are continually forcing people, Pogge argues, we all must realize that we are violating our negative duty, and work to change this reality. We should be altering the economic climate so that it is no longer one-sided in our favor.

It is no doubt true that this will mean that we will incur some costs as a result of this change, just as the end of slavery imposed costs and losses on slaveholders. However, the acceptance of these costs is not charity, but rather justifiable compensation for the harms inflicted on the poor.⁴⁴ Up to this point, he argues, it has been “for the sake of trivial economic gains that national and global elites are keeping billions of human beings in life-threatening poverty with all its attendant evils such as hunger and

⁴³ Ibid., 145. Those in Nazi Germany could respond that they did not popularly elect many of the Nazi leaders, nor adopt policies by popular referendum. While this may be an excuse for German citizens of the time, this only further morally implicates the average Western citizen: We *do* elect our leaders, and have some direct say in the laws and policies that are adopted. Also, while those speaking out against the Nazis may have risked imprisonment and death, the average American is very much able to protest governmental policies and work towards changing them.

⁴⁴ Cf. *PAU*, 51 and *WPHR*, 23. Pogge means to draw a clear distinction between the acceptance of such costs and the “philanthropy” approach such as Singer’s. He sees our increased costs not as helping the poor, but righting the wrongs of our failings to this point, and changing the global rules to prevent such harmful effects in the future.

communicable diseases, child labor and prostitution, trafficking, and premature death.”⁴⁵

We will have to forfeit these minor economic gains, but that means we will cease causing such incredible harms in order to garner them.

On Pogge’s view, it is clear that we don’t *have* to be causing such rampant poverty in order to maintain our standard of living; we could continue to enjoy our standard of living even while ceasing to violate the rights of the poor. Our subsidies, protectionist measures, and other policies he discusses are not standing between our society and immanent economic collapse: “Our countries can flourish quite well without depriving the global poor... We can honor our negative duties and still build the most splendid republic that lofty nationalists, communitarians, and patriots might ever desire.”⁴⁶ Moreover, it is morally indefensible that we are currently opting for such dereliction of our duties in order to garner such minor economic gains. We cannot hide behind our own subsistence rights in order to justify trampling all over the rights of others.

So what do we have to do in order to realize our negative moral duties? For starters, Pogge argues that we must cease the aspects of the international economic order that are causing poverty: protectionist trade measures, agriculture subsidies, the resource privilege, and the borrowing privilege. Without such policies in place, we will be removing some of the most clear-cut causes of poverty in developing nations.

⁴⁵ *PAU*, 107. By “trivial,” Pogge is referring to the vast disparity in wealth between the top 1% and the rest of the world. He argues that doubling the wealth of the bottom 20% of the world’s population would only cost the top group about 1.5% percent of their wealth, a seemingly “trivial” amount, considering with what they would be left. Cf. *Ibid.*, 106-108.

⁴⁶ *WPHR*, 145.

But Pogge realizes that the simple removal of these policies may prove insufficient to raise people up out of the clutches of poverty. To supplement these changes, he advocates adopting an additional policy called the “Global Resources Dividend.” The GRD has its genesis in the idea that the natural resources of the planet should not belong to whoever manages to find themselves as head of state in some particular country, but rather to all of humanity (at least in part). As such, the GRD functions to share the benefits of these resources with all people, especially the poor. He proposes to levy a tax on all natural resources sales. This will end up being passed on to consumers in the form of slightly higher prices on the end goods (such as gasoline from crude oil sales). The proceeds of the tax will then be rebated back to the poorest countries of the world (as their share in the world’s natural resources).⁴⁷ Thus not only has the resource privilege been abandoned, but it has been replaced with a policy that provides a direct avenue for the poorest people of the world to share in the natural wealth of their countries. The GRD functions as a way to repay our debt for the harms that we have done in the past by violating the rights of the poor.

Thus rather than arguing in favor of private philanthropy (à la Singer), Pogge opts for structural reforms to attack the causes of global poverty. That is not to say that he lets individuals off of the hook: in order to enact these structural changes, individuals must lobby their government, support NGOs, protest unjust economic policies, raise awareness, encourage others to get involved, etc., in order to force those in power to stop

⁴⁷ See Ibid., 196 for a more detailed description of the workings of the GRD. One aspect worth noting: Pogge acknowledges that a rebate directly to the government may not actually end up in the hands of the poor citizens (and perhaps only end up causing the same problems as the current resource privilege), so he offers an alternate structure whereby the rebates bypass a given government and are distributed directly among the poor.

violating the rights of the poor. He doesn't explicitly rule out making monetary donations to groups that aid the poor, but he wants to focus on using that money for structural change rather than as a one-time gift. He claims that there are three clear benefits to focusing on structural change over private charity: (1) the burdens are shared among all of those responsible, since we must forfeit some of the economic gains we garner from unjust policies, (2) the money spent can end up providing benefits to a great number of people, rather than just to the fortunate recipients of private charity, and (3) if effective structural change occurs, then we do not have to keep donating year after year, trying to help the poor stay afloat.⁴⁸ If we are able to bring about such structural changes, we can finally stem the tide of global poverty, and begin to effectively eradicate it. But to do so, individuals in affluent nations must realize their complicity in violating the rights of the poor, and work to make such changes become a reality.

Problems with Pogge's Argument

While I think Pogge's argument takes some strides in overcoming the weaknesses of Singer's position, his approach is still beset with a number of significant problems. Conceptually, Pogge's argument relies heavily on a distinction between negative and positive duties; he claims that negative duties are more stringent, and thus they become primary in considering our moral duties towards the poor. But it seems that Pogge's desired ends cannot be achieved without positive actions on the part of those people with negative duties of non-interference (affluent Westerners). He says we have a duty not to uphold an unjust order, but in order to fulfill this obligation we have to actively work to try to change it. As such, this appears to be a positive duty that really says "you have to

⁴⁸ PAU, 55.

work to change structures of global economic order that you have caused,” rather than “don’t harm others through this order.”

One problem here has to do with the causal link between individual Western citizens and the institutions whose policies are responsible for harming the poor. Even if we acknowledge that these institutions and their policies are actively causing harm, how exactly are *we* responsible for these actions? It is clear that we are *benefitting* from these institutions and their economic policies (thus that these policies have beneficial effects for us), but it does not seem that our mere existence as Western consumers is enough to charge us with causing these harms. Did we ask for the economic structures to be constructed in this way? Or was that merely done by those who have the power to set up such institutions? In fact, we may have voted against the leaders who instituted such policies. The rules are no doubt set up to our benefit, but this in no way indicates a direct causal link back to us.

Faced with this objection, Pogge’s response is to connect us to these human rights violations not by way of causality, but by way of our benefitting. Harkening back to his institutional understanding of human rights, he argues that even if we are not in charge of the global economic institutions, we still bear some moral responsibility since we benefit from their decisions, and (at least in the case of governments) they are acting on our behalf. He claims that “Because unjust features of the global institutional order advantage the affluent in many ways, we profit from injustice through most ordinary economic transactions: the rewards for our labor are higher, and many commodities we buy cheaper, than they would be under a global institutional order designed to avoid

foreseeable human rights deficits.”⁴⁹ Again even if we are not the ones who caused the rules to be set up in such a way, we are still linked to these grave wrongs as beneficiaries, and therefore still have a moral responsibility.

But this move from causal agent to beneficiary is problematic. His response to the issue of how exactly Western individuals cause poverty is to assert that, while we may not agree that we are causing it, we are morally bound to act because we benefit from the global economic order. But is “benefitting” from some immoral economic policies really on a par with directly causing them?

Even if we can answer this question in the affirmative, another question must then be answered: how much must we do in order to “stop benefitting” from the economic policies of our global institutions? As Tim Hayward notes, Pogge does not want to make the broad claim that we must “stop benefitting,” as this seems to create an extremely harsh and unrealistic duty in practical terms: how can we actually remove ourselves from any possible benefits as a result of global economic policies, while at the same time continuing to live our lives in Western society?⁵⁰ The “stop benefitting” demand places a relatively impossible burden on the average Western citizen. Instead, Pogge argues that it is wrong to benefit from these policies without compensating those who are harmed in the process: “Uncompensated participation in the imposition of this order can then be

⁴⁹ Thomas Pogge, “Severe Poverty as a Violation of Negative Duties,” *Ethics and International Affairs* 19, no. 1 (2005): 73.

⁵⁰ See here Tim Hayward, “On the Nature of Our Debt to the Global Poor,” *Journal of Social Philosophy* 39, no. 1 (Spring 2008): 6-8. This issue of “benefit” is one about which I think Pogge is not particularly clear. As Norbert Anwander discusses, since citizens in affluent nations appear only to be passively benefitting, it is difficult to then claim such passive benefit is a violation of negative duties (as opposed to a more active sense of benefit). Cf. Norbert Anwander, “Contributing and Benefitting: Two Grounds for Duties to the Victims of Injustice,” *Ethics and International Affairs* 19, no. 1 (2005): 43.

said to be *harming* those whose human rights remain unfulfilled by helping to impose upon them unjust social institutions that contribute to their predicament.”⁵¹ He wants us to see our obligation not as charity, but as “just compensation” for harms that we have either caused or from which we have benefitted.

But we still have to face the quantitative question: what must we do in order to provide for this “just compensation” required by our being beneficiaries of unjust policies? Pogge’s general answer is that we must push to change these policies and to enact the Global Resources Dividend, which will compensate for the past harms of our violating the rights of the poor. Here he is mandating that we must take some positive actions in order to fulfill our negative duty to do no harm to the poor. These duties, however, become quite murky, particularly in terms of their stringency. From an individual standpoint, certainly I can lobby my government to adopt the GRD or stop subsidies, boycott stores, only buy fair-trade products, protest, write letters, etc., but if the institutions do not change the policies in question, what am I to do? Have I thus fulfilled my obligation not to harm the global poor? I am still a beneficiary of the economic structures, even if I am outspoken in my opposition to them. As Corinna Meith points out, my negative duty in this situation appears to be in many ways much more challenging to follow than our more familiar negative duties—the negative duty to refrain from actively killing other people, for instance. In the latter case, I am quite clear in what

⁵¹ Pogge, RWJ, 45.

my duty requires of me: I cannot physically assault other human beings. But in terms of Pogge's negative duties, it is not at all clear what suffices to fulfill my obligation.⁵²

Pogge, however, does not seem to see this problem as a serious issue. In responding to this critique, he claims that the practical sum of our obligation "can be calculated reasonably closely...To fulfill our negative duties, each affluent person need only to do enough to ensure that, if all other affluent persons followed suit, the global poor would be no worse off than the poor under a just global order would be."⁵³ Given assumptions about the involvement of individuals and the actions of our government, Pogge conservatively estimates that we are each responsible for at least one poverty-related death. Taking this into account, he claims it would cost the United States (and its citizens) about \$100 million annually.

Pogge's calculation here is, by his own admission, "complicated" and "messy"—not at all, in my view, satisfactory. I don't think he has even remotely answered the question posed by Meith: how much (and what exactly) do we have to do in order to fulfill our negative duties?⁵⁴

This brings us to a third problem for Pogge's argument. In an attempt to provide a somewhat systematized practical proposal that individuals can support to fulfill their negative duties, he puts forth the Global Resources Dividend. Through the GRD, we are asked to pay higher prices for commodities, with the idea that it will end up back in the

⁵² Cf. Corinna Meith, "World Poverty as a Problem of Justice? A Critical Comparison of Three Approaches," *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice* 11 (2008): 25-26.

⁵³ Thomas Pogge, "Responses to the Critics," in *Thomas Pogge and his Critics*, ed. Alison Jaggar (Malden, MA: Polity 2010), 207.

⁵⁴ For his full description of his calculations see "Severe Poverty as a Violation of Negative Duties," *Ethics and International Affairs*, 79-82.

hands of the poorest of the poor. But while the GRD may provide some monetary relief from the crushing effects of poverty, will it really *solve* global poverty? Isn't this just another transfer of wealth, but through a different channel than the one proposed by Singer (institutional rather than individual)? While Pogge may or may not be right to claim (as noted above) that such institutional donations trump Singer's individual philanthropy in terms of efficacy and scope, he has not provided a sufficient argument as to why this will end conditions of poverty. In essence, he changes some rules of the game, but while we may end up with providing some compensation to the poor who are being harmed by us, it is by no means clear that these changes will result in the cessation of global poverty.

Ending the resource and borrowing privileges may also provide some headway in the struggle against poverty, but will their disappearance allow poor countries and their people unfettered access to the tools necessary to build a better standard of living? As Alan Patten argues, the claim that ending these privileges will sufficiently undercut the causes of poverty is mistaken. While it is true that local/national factors in these countries (such as corrupt ruling elites) are in some ways supported by international rules and the economic framework, they won't simply disappear because the international rules are changed. Even if tyrannical, undemocratic rule disappears, as Patten points out, "even fairly democratic countries, operating under an international set of rules that have been shaped for their own advantage, can routinely fail to enact policies designed to help their poorest and most marginalized citizens."⁵⁵

⁵⁵ Alan Patten, "Should We Stop Thinking about Poverty in Terms of Helping the Poor?" *Ethics and International Affairs* 19, no. 1 (2005): 24.

The fact of the matter is, even if we end our tariffs and subsidies, the resource and borrowing privileges, and institute GRD payments, the economic playing field will not suddenly be leveled out. Pogge seems to think that truly “free trade” (which he endorses) will enable the people of developing nations to climb out of poverty. But he neglects the possibility that the advantages enjoyed by affluent nations in terms of technological innovation, infrastructure, or the scale of economies give the global poor little or no chance of competing successfully in this free-trade marketplace—unless they keep their own wages disastrously low. If they are unable to compete against large corporate Western producers, then even without the crippling resource and borrowing privileges, they will flounder. Even in the absence of the national factors with which Patton is concerned, it is not at all apparent that developing nations will suddenly have their boats “rise up with the tide.”⁵⁶

Conclusion

Overall, I do think that Pogge’s approach makes significant strides past Singer’s in the right direction. I am sympathetic to his argument that implicates individual Western citizens in the active impoverishment of people around the globe. At the same time, however, Pogge’s argument is beset with its own problems, stemming from grounding his approach in a conception of negative duties. While he is rightly focused in on the question of causality, he does not sufficiently answer the critical questions of moral motivation for individuals: (1) how am I (as an individual) actively causing the

⁵⁶ This is a concern that David Schweickart makes clear, insofar as there may be further structural issues that play a role in causing poverty, above and beyond the ones upon which Pogge focuses. Cf. David Schweickart, “Global Poverty: Alternative Perspectives on What We Should Do—and Why,” *Journal of Social Philosophy* (Winter 2008): 477-479.

impoverishment of millions? (2) Even if I accept that I am causally implicated, how much must I do? (3) If we in rich countries cease violating the rights of the poor, will this really end global poverty? From the standpoint of moral motivation, the implications of these questions are tremendously problematic for Pogge's argument. Is it enough to say that I voted for the other candidate, protested the WTO summits, or sent money to Oxfam? In the end, Pogge runs up against some critiques similar to those which struck such serious blows to Singer's argument: how much must I give, and will it really end up bringing about the end of global poverty? Without satisfactory answers to these questions—or a shift in framework—it is unlikely that individuals will be motivated to act to end global poverty.

Given these issues, I argue that Pogge's human rights approach as it is currently constructed is unsatisfactory. But before moving to my own proposal (one that addresses moral motivation, as well as the underlying causes of poverty), I want to examine an important response to the arguments of both Singer and Pogge that comes through the lens of a feminist ethic of care.

CHAPTER THREE

VIRGINIA HELD AND AN ETHIC OF CARE

At the end of the last chapter, I pointed out that Thomas Pogge's argument from negative rights runs up against several issues in terms of moral motivation. From the standpoint of the individual, we are left with the question: "How am I actively violating the rights of the poor on the other side of the world (thereby causing their poverty)?" Despite what is otherwise a plausible argument about Western policies, Pogge cannot clear this hurdle if his interlocutor is unwilling to accept that she is personally violating the negative rights of the poor. And even if she does accept that she is violating the rights of the poor, the details as to what she must do to fulfill her duty are unclear.

In this chapter, I want to examine an ethical approach to global poverty that distances itself from any reliance on human rights. Rather than trying to convince people that the poor have human rights, that these rights are being violated by our actions, and thus that we are violating our negative duties, we must realize how connected and interrelated to the poor we are and recognize our responsibility to care for them in virtue of these relationships. In establishing this position, Virginia Held argues that we should act because we are connected to the poor as fellow human beings, and members of the global economic community. As a result of these relationships, we must actively care about and for their needs.

Before establishing Held's position, I will explain the development of the ethic of care as it has emerged through the work of Carol Gilligan and Nel Noddings. I will then detail Virginia Held's further development of the ethic of care as it applies to the issue of global poverty. While I am sympathetic to Held's argument and its focus on our interrelatedness as human beings (especially our being connected to the poor), I will lastly offer some criticisms of her argument.

The Development of an Ethic of Care

Originally, the ethic of care developed as a response to the ethic of rights, which was seen to be overly "masculine." "Classical" care ethicists argued that concepts such as rights and duties are associated with a masculine view of the world. Relationships are seen as essentially symmetrical/equal; each individual has rights, and other individuals have duties based on those rights. Both individuals are possessors of rights and duties, and thus the relationship is equally balanced. The paradigmatic relationship on this worldview is two adults, freely interacting with each other. In contrast, from the care standpoint, key relationships are asymmetrical; different people have different roles that they fulfill in relationships. The paradigmatic relationship according to care ethicists is the parent/child relationship, wherein the two people are unequal, and have different needs. As a result, care ethicists argue that our moral theory should not only take this natural asymmetry into account, but also make it central.

The ethic of care can be traced back (in large part) to the empirical research of Carol Gilligan, as reported in her influential 1982 book *In a Different Voice*.¹ In this work, Gilligan details how she tested the traditional understanding of how human beings psychologically conceptualize moral decisions. This understanding postulates that humans situate themselves in relation to societal rules, and then work through moral issues by seeing what rules apply to the issue at hand.² Based upon what rules would be broken or upheld as a result of a particular course of action, a person would make a decision. Gilligan's empirical research calls this traditional "universal" procedure into question by probing the moral decision-making process of individuals with regard to different moral dilemmas and situations. She performed three separate studies: the "college student study," focused on a group of college students' responses to moral dilemmas and life choices while taking a course on morality, the "abortion decision study," focused on women who were pregnant (in their first trimester) but considering the possibility of an abortion, and lastly the "rights and responsibilities study," focused on a random sampling of individuals' responses to hypothetical moral dilemmas (taken at nine different points throughout the individuals' lives). In her research, Gilligan found that two different and distinct "voices" emerged, primarily along gender lines: one (predominantly masculine) voiced concerns about rules and whether or not people were breaking them, while the other (predominantly feminine) voiced concerns about how a possible decision would affect others to whom the person was connected. Those who

¹ Carol Gilligan, *In A Different Voice* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982).

² Gilligan's work is a direct response to the work of Jean Piaget and Lawrence Kohlberg, the latter being her colleague and mentor.

spoke in this latter voice way talked about their relationship to other people in the given situation, their past and future relationships, and measured themselves not with respect to rules, but rather with respect to standards of nurturing and care. She points towards phrases such as “giving to,” “helping out,” “being kind,” and “not hurting” as occurring regularly in the responses she received; these clearly exhibit concern for the participants’ relationships, rather than whether or not their actions violated any traditional moral rules.³ Gilligan argues that, from an empirical standpoint, this new “voice” came most often from women, while men in her studies tended to respond in the more “traditional voice” of rules.

Another example Gilligan cites that corroborates this difference between male and female responses to morality comes from empirical research on playground studies with children, done by Janet Lever.⁴ This research found that boys focus their games around principles, which are never questioned nor broken. Whenever a dispute arises, these rules are consulted to reach a course of action. Each member of the group is treated equally in relation to these principles, but the rules are never compromised in favor of any member of the group. Girls, on the other hand, are willing to break or alter principles of their games, as they consider how it will affect the participants, with whom they have a caring relationship. Playing baseball, for instance, boys stick by a “three strikes and you’re out” rule, whereas girls were more likely to allow extra chances so that someone may hit the

³ Cf. *In A Different Voice*, 158-159. These were some of the most common phrases that Gilligan found, particularly in responses in the rights and responsibilities study.

⁴ Ibid., 9-10. Gilligan also references similar (previous) studies performed by Jean Piaget and George Herbert Mead, who watched children play marbles. Cf. Carol Gilligan, “Moral Orientation and Moral Development,” *Women and Moral Theory*, Eds. Eva Kittay and Diana Meyers (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1987), 21-22.

ball. For girls, Gilligan argues, their perspectives on morality and moral claims are “arising from the experience of connection and conceived [of] as a problem of inclusion, rather than one of balancing claims.”⁵

Gilligan acknowledges that earlier studies from Freud, Piaget, and Kohlberg sometimes noted that women’s responses to moral dilemmas often diverged from the usual masculine responses. But rather than investigating this further, her predecessors saw this as evidence that women were somehow deficient in their moral thinking; they were a developmental failure (a conclusion of Freud) from the standpoint of morality, rather than exhibiting a unique or different aspect of their moral decision making.⁶

But why does this divergence exist? Gilligan cites developmental theorist Nancy Chodorow’s argument that the early social environment impacts the development of boys and girls differently.⁷ Since women are largely responsible for early child care, a young girl experiences her development in terms of a great deal of contact with another female (her mother). As Gilligan notes, this means that girls “experience themselves as like their mothers, thus fusing the experience of attachment with the process of identity formation.”⁸ As her mother is caring, so a girl develops herself to be caring as well. In contrast, the male child seeking to develop himself as masculine, which entails a differentiation from the way in which his mother acts. Thus girls use their mother as a positive role model (“be like her”) in terms of developing their identity, whereas boys use

⁵ *In A Different Voice*, 160.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 6-7.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 7-9, and Nancy Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978).

⁸ Gilligan, *In A Different Voice*, 8.

their mother as a negative role model (“be different from her”) in their identity development. The result is that the moral “voice” that men and women use in making moral decisions differs between one that focuses on rules and principles, and one that is inflected with concerns of care and attachment.

Situating this newfound conception of morality in relation to rights, Gilligan claims that the central feature of rights is an abstraction from concrete others by relying on impersonal principles. According to a rights perspective, we can do what we want to do, just as long as we do not violate the rights of others. Gilligan disagrees with the primacy of such principles; instead of our moral standing always (and only) being accounted for in relation to impartial standards, she argues that we should also be seen as individuals within the context of relationships, and we should have a responsibility to others based on these relationships. Gilligan’s use of the term “responsibility” as opposed to “care” is important here. She wants to distinguish our moral imperatives under an ethic of care from those we have under an ethic of rights. Under a rights perspective, we have *obligations* to other people only if their rights are violated. Under a care perspective, we must *respond* to the needs of other people (thus we have a *responsibility* to them). For Gilligan, the concept of responsibility involves activities that focus on the needs of other people, rather than focusing on abstract principles.

Thus she distinguishes an ethic of rights from an ethic of care: “While the ethic of rights is a manifestation of equal respect, balancing claims of other and self, the ethic of responsibility rests on an understanding that gives rise to compassion and care.”⁹ Rather than being ultimately concerned with treating everyone fairly, an ethic of responsibility is

⁹ Ibid., 164-165.

ultimately concerned with making sure that unmet care needs are minimized. Gilligan argues in favor of a balanced approach, taking into account both the rights and care perspectives. We therefore should respond to others' needs for care primarily because we feel a sense of personal responsibility in virtue of a relationship, rather than always appealing to impersonal principles (although such appeals may sometimes be necessary).

Taking Gilligan's empirical research into account, Nel Noddings tries to go further and generate a philosophical ethic of care in her work *Caring: A Feminine Approach to Ethics and Moral Education*.¹⁰ Noddings explores Gilligan's findings from a more phenomenological standpoint, working to detail a process of moral decision-making based in our feelings of care. She argues for a full-fledged "ethic of care" as an alternative moral theory (as opposed to utilitarianism, deontology, etc.), and provides a philosophical justification for where care comes from, how we learn to care, and what care generates in terms of moral standards. This ethic of care has as its paradigm the attachment and caring relationship between a mother and a child. Much like Gilligan, Noddings argues that the Western masculine conception of "universal justice" has tended to treat individuals impersonally by implicitly regarding all relationships as in some way equal or symmetrical.¹¹ Rather than people looking to the individual circumstances of a situation, an ethic of rights first dictates that we must look to principles of justice or rights in order to understand how these rules must be applied in our given situation. Thus any individual or situation can fit within this framework of general principles in order to

¹⁰ Nel Noddings, *Caring: A Feminine Approach to Ethics and Moral Education* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1984).

¹¹ Ibid., 85.

make a moral judgment. Noddings points out that in applying universal principles, we are forced to abstract away from concrete situations in order to see if the given situation fits into a pre-established category. When this occurs, she argues that “We often lose the very qualities or factors that gave rise to the moral question in the situation.”¹² Noddings agrees that there is something natural or shared that gives rise to our moral precepts, but it is not as impersonal as “universal justice”; rather, she argues that all individuals have a natural disposition to care for others.¹³

This “natural caring” is the basis for our ethics in relationships, but it is not in and of itself an ethical relationship. Natural caring is merely the biological sentiment to care for one’s young; it is not care performed out of any sense of moral obligation. In this way, we don’t yet have an imperative that we should care for other people to whom we are not biologically related.

To produce this imperative, Noddings posits what she calls “ethical caring,” which generates a feeling that one “must” care for another person. She argues that this “must” stems from reflection, where “I have a picture of those moments in which I was cared for and in which I cared, and I may reach toward this memory and guide my conduct by it.”¹⁴ Through reflections on being in care situations (either caring or being

¹² Ibid., 83.

¹³ This is a point of distinction between Noddings and Nancy Chodorow. Noddings argues that while Chodorow’s “psychological view” of why men and women develop different conceptions of morality is plausible, it can be overcome. She claims that boys have a biological desire to care that, while they “grow” out of it because of their developmental environment, can be reestablished. Thus Noddings claims that boys can be educated in such a way as to engender a sense of caring as part of their moral development, which will in turn establish the natural caring that leads to a sense of ethical caring. See here Ibid., 128-129 and 182-183 for her hypotheses about how this moral “reeducation” of boys could take place.

¹⁴ Ibid., 80.

cared for), we are able to generate an ideal care relationship that is meant to serve as a sort of muse or direction for relating to the other that exists in front of us in a given situation.

This distinction between natural and ethical caring plays an important role in Noddings' ethic of care as it generates the "must" imperative or obligation to respond and care for others. It is important to note that this caring "must" is not the same as a sense of duty in rights or justice language. Noddings gives the example of a mother and a child: if the child cries, the mother first "wants" to respond to the child (from a natural biological imperative), and out of this desire for natural caring she feels (in an ethical sense) that she "must." Thus in these terms "The 'must' is not a dutiful imperative but one that accompanies the 'I want'...it is a 'must' born of desire."¹⁵ When we are in a situation that necessitates a moral judgment, the particular individuals and circumstances come into play. Rather than an ethic that generates universally applicable imperatives such as "don't kill" or "abortion is wrong," Noddings' version of care ethics relies distinctly on the individual circumstances and situations with which one is presented. It is true that moral theories of utilitarianism or human rights take into account individual circumstances. But making a moral decision on those moral theories involves first looking to impersonal moral standards, and then determining how they apply to our individual situation. According to Noddings' conception of care ethics, this appeal to impersonal moral standards is inappropriate. We should *begin* with individual circumstances, and our action should come as a reaction to such a situation. For instance, when a mother hears her infant's cry, she should not first look to what principles apply in

¹⁵ Ibid., 82.

her situation, and then determine the appropriate course of action; instead, according to Noddings, she should just act in response to her circumstances (in this case her crying infant). An ethic of care necessitates a response that takes into account the individuals within the relationship, and the situation within which the relationship exists.¹⁶ An ethic of care stems from a natural sense of caring, and develops to having a “must”-type of imperative that links up to wanting to care for others. Thus Noddings argues that this imperative lies at the base of her alternative ethical theory of care. This ethic of care is meant to supersede moralities of utilitarianism or human rights.

Before moving to Virginia Held and her application of an ethic of care to global poverty, it is important to review precisely how it is distinct from an ethic of utilitarianism or human rights. Rather than a “top-down” approach, working from moral principles to individual circumstances, care ethics works to make moral decisions starting with the individual circumstances and relationships, and from there derives a moral imperative to act. Singer’s utilitarian argument involves first appealing to (or deriving) a general moral principle, and then applying it to the case of global poverty. Similarly, Pogge’s argument works by appealing to the universal standard of human rights (specifically in terms of our negative duties).

Instead of working from abstract principles of utilitarianism or human rights, care ethics starts from the standpoint of our relationships (many of which are unequal by nature). Given these relationships and the needs of those to whom we are related, we develop a sense of moral responsibility to care for others. Philosopher Carol Gould

¹⁶ While these individual circumstances play a great role, Noddings argues that her position does not collapse into relativism. Underlying this focus on individual situations is the (possibly) universalizable Ideal Care Relationship, and striving to maintain this. See *Ibid.*, 82-84 on this point.

offers a concise summary of the ethic of care, and how it contrasts with other moral theories:

Care – an idea originally articulated on the basis of women’s experiences in the practice of mothering but clearly of more general application – encompasses a range of characteristic dispositions, such as concern for the other not out of duty, but out of empathy; attentiveness and sensitivity to the needs of others, and, more strongly, taking the others’ interests as equal to or more important than one’s own; attention to the growth of the other; and an orientation to the common interests of the family or of those who are close or related to one. These feelings and dispositions are directed, at least initially, to particular others rather than universally, and so they tend to contrast with traditional notions of universal and impartial principles and obligations.¹⁷

Virginia Held: Rights and Care

One contemporary approach that both invokes and updates the perspective of care comes from Virginia Held. In her 2006 book *The Ethics of Care: Personal, Political, and Global*, Held attempts to reconcile Gilligan’s and Noddings’ formulations of an ethic of care with rights language, and to apply care to global issues such as poverty.¹⁸

According to Held, Gilligan sees “care” and “justice” as two separate lenses through which individuals view moral issues, and claims there is a place for each in our moral decision-making; while Noddings agrees with the existence of these two lenses, she instead wants to replace a justice-based morality with an ethic of care. Rather than either of these two positions, Held develops care as an aspect of our moral life, a practice which must be exercised and cultivated prior to any conception of rights-based morality.

¹⁷ Carol Gould, *Globalizing Democracy and Human Rights* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 43.

¹⁸ Virginia Held, *The Ethics of Care: Personal, Political, and Global* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006).

Care versus Rights

Held understands an ethic of care as centering on the caring needs of other people, rather than on developing ourselves as “caring individuals.”¹⁹ On Held’s view, care is seen to be separate from a disposition of individuals; it is not merely a virtue that the best kind of human being would exhibit. Rather, care involves actively taking account of our relationships, and working to maintain these relationships by caring for other people. As she puts it, “The focus will remain, for the caring person, on his or her *relations* rather than on his or her own dispositions, and on the *practice* of care.”²⁰ This concern for relations rather than dispositions, she says, delineates care as a “practice” from care as a “virtue.” Understood as a virtue of human beings, “caring” means that I am a “caring person” because I take care of the people in my personal sphere. Held argues that this view of care is too focused on the individual and her moral character, rather than on the needs of other people to whom she is related. Thus care as a practice means that I am “caring” because those to whom I am related have their care needs met. The other people in this image are concrete others with specific needs that must be met in order for them to be considered “cared for.” Care must be seen as a practice that develops over time, by means of the repeated instances of caring for other individuals with whom we have relationships. The moral importance of caring does not spring out of our developing

¹⁹ Held cites philosopher Michael Slote as someone who offers this view of care as a disposition or motivation of persons. Slote argues in favor of an agent-based virtue ethics of caring; on this view, the moral status of an action is determined with reference to the caring motives of the agent. Thus a moral person is one who exhibits a virtue of care in their intentions, and works to see those intentions through in practice. As I will go on to discuss, Held disagrees with this view of the place of care, and claims instead that actual caring relations (and the maintenance of such relations) is a central aspect of an ethic of care. On this point see Held, 51, and Michael Slote, *Morals from Motives* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 42.

ourselves as a “caring” person, but instead springs more out of our actually caring about people with whom we relate. Held offers a succinct description of the ethic of care as she understands it: “The ethics of care...focuses on persons responding with sensitivity to the needs of particular others with whom they share interests.”²¹

In agreement with Gilligan and Noddings, Held points out that an ethic of care characteristically views persons as relational and interdependent. Care is of primary moral importance to human beings precisely because of our nature as creatures who relate to and depend upon other people. She argues that this is contrary to the view of human beings in the rights tradition, where humans are viewed as much more individualized, and our relationships as constructed around rules, rights, and duties. Held takes John Rawls’ Kantian-influenced *A Theory of Justice* as emblematic of a justice/rights perspective: “It sees justice as the most important basis on which to judge the acceptability of political and social arrangements. It insists on respecting persons through recognition of their rights and provides moral constraints within which individuals may pursue their interests.”²² The primary concern from a rights perspective is to provide a framework under which individual actions take place, rather than starting with the needs and circumstances of individual people. As long as I do not violate the rights of another person, I am free to act as I see fit.

²¹ Ibid., 63.

²² Ibid. Notice that Held couples the “rights” perspective (evocative of Pogge’s arguments from the last chapter) with a wider “justice” perspective. Her conception of a “justice perspective” maps onto the approach of Pogge, insofar as the core of both perspectives is rights and the duties of individuals that spring from those rights. Note also, however, that many other rights theorists and justice theorists make significant distinctions between the two sets of conceptions, and thus they are not necessarily isomorphic.

While Held sees this conception of justice/rights as offering important benchmarks for the moral treatment of individuals, she claims that it neglects some critical aspects of the way in which we relate to other people. She argues that “The ethics of care, in contrast [to justice/rights], conceptualizes persons as deeply affected by, and involved in, relations with others; to many care theorists persons are at least partly constituted by their social ties.”²³ We are constantly involved in relationships where care is of primary importance in shaping the moral components of our actions. In other words, we don’t just treat another person well because we are bound not to violate her rights, but rather because we care about her and our relationship to her. In this way, Held points out that “Caring well...requires vastly more than simply treating [people] fairly and not violating their basic rights.”²⁴ Take a relationship between a parent and a child, for example: simply respecting a negative right of non-interference does little in the way of effectively providing for the needs of the child. In order to meet the child’s needs, the parent must recognize that a relationship exists between the two of them, and as a result actively care for the child.

Even apart from the example of parent/child, our interactions with other human beings often depend upon a lot more than bare respect for rights. As Held mentions, it is likely that, “When in society individuals treat each other with only the respect that justice requires but no further considerations, the social fabric of trust and concern can be

²³ Ibid., 46.

²⁴ Ibid., 73.

missing or disappearing.”²⁵ This is not to say that Held agrees completely with Noddings’ argument that we should replace justice/rights perspective with a care perspective; she acknowledges that in some relationships we can use rights as minimum standards in our relations with others to a solid degree of success. In commercial relationships, for example, as long as we respect the rights of the other person in the transaction (such as not physically coercing them, or abiding by the terms of any legal agreement), we can be seen as appropriately fulfilling our moral obligations. At the same time, there is only a minimal standard in place here; while this is acceptable in some relationships, it cannot be reconciled with our moral standards for many of our other relationships. Our personal relationships often involve the amalgamation of our own interests with those of another person, and we often place trust in the relationship and our relations. If our moral considerations only reach as far as not violating others’ rights in these relationships, we leave out these critical aspects of our lives. As Held puts it, “Moral theories that assume only individuals pursuing their own interests within the constraints supplied by universal rules are ill-suited to deal with the realities and values of caring relations and of relational persons in a global context.”²⁶ So rather than a justice/rights perspective that neglects the realities of our caring relations and dependencies, the ethic of care “focuses on attentiveness to context, trust, responding to

²⁵ Ibid., 71.

²⁶ Ibid., 157.

needs, and offers narrative nuance; it cultivates caring relations in both personal, political, and global contexts.”²⁷

Held is concerned with meshing justice/rights and care together in such a way as to deal effectively with obligations that arise both because of duties, and because of our relationships. She argues not only that care should be part of our moral decision-making process, but also that care as a practice is more primary to our relationships than is justice/rights; care is, she argues, a sort of “wider moral framework into which justice should be fitted.”²⁸ A justice/rights conception of morality dictates a certain equal moral minimum that should not be violated. In all of our relationships, there is no doubt a minimum standard of treatment (or respect for rights) that must be in place. But as Held points out: “Empirically before there can be respect for rights there must be a sense of social connectedness with those others whose rights are recognized.”²⁹ This social connectedness and recognition of others as being persons worthy of our respect and effort comes through the perspective of care. In one sense, by establishing that we care about other people, we are therefore able to recognize that they are also human beings with rights, and that those rights must not be violated. Note that this picture of care as a “wider moral framework” does not bracket care into an exclusively foundational role; because she has established care as a practice, Held argues that an ethic of care pushes us to go far beyond merely respecting the rights of other people.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid., 71.

²⁹ Ibid., 125.

Thus Held claims that we must not only see obligations to others in terms of justice/rights, but also (and more importantly) in terms of seeing others as needing care and our moral obligations as stemming from our relationships.³⁰

Held's Ethic of Care and Poverty

Turning directly to the issue of global poverty, Held first notes that “Few trends could be more obviously in conflict with the values of care than a trend toward increasing hunger.”³¹ Citing U.N. statistics showing that the number of hungry people in the developing world grew between 2000 and 2004, she argues that poor people are not having their needs met, and thus are not being appropriately cared for. Taking into account her view of care as a practice, and her position that everyone must recognize the responsibilities that they have to care for others who are dependent and in need of care, she argues that an ethic of care “clearly implies that the members of wealthy societies must recognize their responsibilities to alleviate the hunger and gross deprivations in care afflicting so many members of poor ones.”³²

Much like Singer and Pogge, Held is trying to argue for a moral obligation on the part of individuals in wealthy societies to provide aid to poor people around the world.

But Held's ethic of care approach focuses on individual differences and social

³⁰ Held's version of an ethic of care does not assume that the relationships between people are relations that are necessarily entered into voluntarily by free and equal individuals; relationships are constituted in various ways and in various forms, depending on the individuals and their circumstances. As she argues, “Relations between persons can be criticized when they become dominating, exploitative, mistrustful, or hostile. Relations of care can be encouraged and maintained.” Ibid., 158. This is a key element of her care ethics position: it is attentive to the realities of relationships, including the possibility of unequal power and coercive relations.

³¹ Ibid., 160.

³² Ibid., 159-160.

connectedness, rather than on utility or individuals' rights or duties, and as a result she argues that her view is more appropriate. As she puts it, "The ethics of care, with its attention to actual differences between persons and groups and its resistance to universalizing all into an abstraction of the ahistorical rational-individual-as-such, may be more suited to the realities of global differences."³³ She claims that focusing on caring relations allows individual circumstances to play an important role in the way that we respond to the poor and their situations. A key feature of her argument is an emphasis on social connections: she claims that prior to any conception of rights, there must be an acceptance that the global poor fall under our net of caring relations, and thus we should care about their well-being. Like Pogge, Held claims that we are connected to the poor in virtue of the global economic community, but she also argues that we are connected more importantly as fellow members of the human community.

In developing this sense of connection, Held approvingly cites Fiona Robinson's work. Robinson argues that an ethic of care is inherently a relational ethic that involves humans being concerned with "concrete" rather than "generalizable" others. In terms of an approach to global poverty, Robinson claims that this is a distinct asset to the care ethics approach: "Because care forces us to think concretely about people's real needs and to evaluate how those needs will be met, it introduces questions about what we value into the public, and ultimately the international, sphere."³⁴ Rather than thinking abstractly about other people on the other side of the world and how our actions are

³³ Ibid., 165.

³⁴ Fiona Robinson, *Globalizing Care* (Colorado: Westview Press, 1999), 31.

violating our rights, care ethics forces us to look directly at the lack of care in the lives of those people.

Taking Robinson's point into account, Held sets up a "net" of caring relations in terms of the recognition of group membership: "Before rights can be specified, respected, and upheld, persons must agree on who the members of the group are within which they are to be specified and respected and upheld...all must feel sufficiently connected to seek agreement among themselves and to be willing to respect each others' rights."³⁵ Even before establishing others as holders of rights (and ourselves as holders of duties), Held points out that we must delineate what constitutes membership in our given social groups, and thus to what "others" we are connected. Before we can respect the rights of others, we have to see that we are connected to those others through some shared group. Held therefore asserts that "A relation of social connection, or a caring relation, is normatively prior and has priority over an acknowledgement of rights."³⁶

Held places a high priority on social connection; in particular, the connection she claims exists (or should exist) between the affluent and the poor of the globe. Empirically, she argues that it is no doubt possible for a caring person to develop and sustain a caring relationship with people not just in front of her, but also across the globe. Caring relations "can extend to fellow members of groups of various kinds, to fellow

³⁵ Held, 129.

³⁶ Ibid., 125.

citizens, and beyond. We can, for instance, develop caring relations for person who are suffering deprivation in distant parts of the globe.”³⁷

Given that we are able to care for others around the globe, Held argues that we have a responsibility to care for the poor in developing countries, as their care needs are not being met:

The ethics of care clearly implies that society must recognize its responsibilities to its children and other who are dependent, enabling the best possible bringing up and educating of its future generations, appropriate responses to its members in need of...care, and assistance with the care of dependents.³⁸

Thus we are connected to the global poor, and therefore we have responsibility to care for them and work to meet their needs. While each individual in the West may not see himself as connected to every individual poor person in the developing world, we as individuals need to work to continually expand our connections of care.

Held states that her argument focusing on global poverty is not just an attempt to get people in Western countries to abstractly “care about” those people living in destitution; rather, she seeks to urge Westerners to acknowledge that they have a responsibility to see to the specific care needs and individual circumstances of the poor. This approach, Held says, is a strategy founded on “*closeness* rather than distance or *remoteness*, based on promoting *interaction* rather than following *rules*.”³⁹ Robinson agrees with this goal, claiming that individuals must “approach moral problems by looking carefully at where, why, and how the structures of existing social and personal

³⁷ Ibid., 157.

³⁸ Ibid., 159.

³⁹ Held, 160.

relations have led to exclusion and marginalization, as well as at how attachments may have degenerated or broken down so as to cause suffering.”⁴⁰ In practical terms, both Held and Robinson argue that entities with the means to effect change (governments, NGOs) must work with existing connections across borders and try to broaden their scope by establishing new connections with new peoples. In this way, the more people that get involved, the more the “moral distance” between the First and Third worlds will shrink. Thus, according to Held and Robinson, if we can better establish connections of care across global borders, it would go a long way in allowing individuals to find solutions that provide care for those who need it.

In terms of such practical solutions, Held argues that an approach to poverty generated by the ethic of care would center on organizing economic structures to actually meet the needs of everyone (the poor especially), rather than leaving them as they are currently: set up so as to provide a great deal of wealth for a few people, while at the same time creating and maintaining widespread poverty. Thus she claims that the ethic of care would “make the meeting of genuine economic needs a high priority.”⁴¹ Some of Held’s possible solutions to the issue of global poverty are economic in character, and look similar to those prescribed by those who favor a human rights approach, such as Pogge. She specifically argues for the cessation of national farm subsidies and better national welfare programs, as such initiatives will promote a kind of economic development that allows for the needs of everyone (including those people in poor countries) to be met.

⁴⁰ Robinson, 46.

⁴¹ Held, 65.

But given how her ethic of care works in being attuned to circumstances and individual care relations, many of her prescriptive claims differ from those offered by Pogge or Singer. For example, she argues that we must work to transform the overarching cultural constructs that drive the priorities of nations and world leaders; in particular, she singles out the “cultural construct of masculinity” and its effects on the behavior of states. She defines this construct as follows: “Among its influences are the overemphasis on the part of states on military security and economic preeminence, and the neglect of other aspects of security such as environmental and ecological concerns, the moral acceptability of policies to those affected, and the cultivating and maintaining of cooperative relations with others.”⁴² She argues that by focusing the work of nongovernmental organizations and international agencies on developing ties of care between actual persons, there is a much better chance of decreasing the exploitation and domination of this culture.

Held’s approach also has another beneficial aspect, stemming from her argument for the priority of care over rights: establishing and fostering caring relations between peoples lessens the likelihood that people will violate the rights of others. In our current world, the rights violations upon which Pogge focuses his concerns come about, according to Held, because people do not care enough about the other human beings who are being harmed by their actions. But, as she argues, “In a world in which the multiple ties of care would have been expanded to encompass the whole human community,

⁴² Ibid., 161. Held acknowledges that calling this a “culture of masculinity” certainly alludes to the attitudes of men, but argues that such a culture is not merely propagated by men; it is a construct that is utilized by all in power, focused on solidifying their power, rather than caring for those over whom they have power.

poverty and exclusion really would be on the wane rather than, as at present, increasing... (Thus) caring relations might make appeals to human rights less important.”⁴³ In other words, if everyone actually cares for the global poor and responds to their situation, we might not need to rely on (or resort to) trying to convince people to act because others have had their rights violated.

In summing up her position, Held argues that an ethic of care approach not only achieves the goals of a rights-based approach, but goes beyond to meet the diversity of needs of all people around the world:

More attenuated but still evident caring relations between more distant people enable them to trust each other enough to form social organizations and political entities and to accept each other as fellow citizens of states. A globalization of caring relations would help enable people of different states and cultures to live in peace, to respect each others’ rights, to care together for their environments, and to improve the lives of their children.⁴⁴

Strengths and Shortcomings of the Care Ethics Approach

At this juncture, I want to mention three specific strengths of the care ethics position. The first strength is the fact that Held’s argument is built upon an inherent sense of interdependence and social connectedness. The concept of responsibility, for care ethicists, moves away from the strict emphasis on duties that an appeal to human rights invokes. Instead, the concept of care is one that involves connecting directly with other individuals. It proceeds from a standpoint of compassion and empathy towards others, and is thus deeply relational and interpersonal. Care involves responding to the needs of specific others and caring for them. Rather than being compelled by an

⁴³ Ibid., 166.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 168.

impersonal duty (even if we agree with the existence of such duty), we are responsible for responding out of an internal sense of caring for those with whom we have a relationship.

Much of the potency of a care ethics position comes from its taking account of the relationships that human beings have with one another. In trying to establish an interpersonal standard for all human beings to live by, the human rights approach treats all individuals as equal at a basic level. While on one hand this is attractive (in preventing baseline discrimination), it becomes problematic as it neglects the unique circumstances of the relationships within which all individuals are enmeshed.

This first strength leads into a second (closely related) one: the centrality of diverse human needs. In focusing on our relationships, care ethics highlights that inherent inequalities are a shared fact of our humanity. Individuals have different needs, which vary based on innumerable factors (especially the circumstances of the relationships in which we partake). For instance, an infant has much different needs than an adult; our developmental stage can make a big difference in what needs we have. This inherent diversity must play a role in the morality that we use to deal with these needs.⁴⁵ The approach to poverty that Held and Robinson argue for works directly from the diversity of human needs; our caring response will vary in individual situations, depending on the individual care needs of poor people.

⁴⁵ Joan Tronto points out that this facet of care ethics is particularly important in changing assumptions about human beings. She argues that adopting a care perspective brings the issue of dependency to the forefront, particularly our levels of dependency on other human beings. Similarly, Eva Kittay details how this inherent diversity and inequality of needs exists for human beings in terms of development, especially in the cases of people who are developmentally disabled. Cf. Joan Tronto, *Moral Boundaries* (New York: Routledge, 1993), especially 161-177, and Eva Feder Kittay, *Love's Labor* (New York: Routledge, 1999).

The third major strength of care ethics is that it undercuts the Western conception of the “rugged individual” or the “self-made person.” Many individuals (especially in the West) argue that although they may require care as a baby or in their old age, between these two time periods (i.e. during adulthood) they in fact do not need anyone to care for them; they can “take care of themselves.” In this sense, they claim that they are self-sufficient. Extrapolating, they argue that if they as adults do not require others to care for them, then they need not care for others at this stage of life. Attacking this claim, Held points out that adult individuals are not atomistic creatures that function independent of others around them. Rather, we are dependent during childhood, and we remain “interdependent with others in thoroughly fundamental ways throughout our lives...that we can think and act as if we were independent depends on a network of social relations making it possible for us to do so.”⁴⁶ Even as “rugged individuals” we cannot operate in a vacuum, and we must rely on those to whom we are socially connected throughout our lives, even at the pinnacle of our adulthood. Care ethics asserts that we have relationships with others, and, given these relations, we have responsibilities to care for those to whom we are socially related.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Held, 13-14.

⁴⁷ Against this view of society as a collection of “rugged individuals,” Iris Marion Young argues that individuals are instead beholden to what she calls “relational autonomy.” Taking a cue from care ethics, Young claims in her work *Global Challenges* that an adequate conception of autonomy “should promote the capacity of individuals to pursue their own ends in the context of relationships in which others may do the same.” (*Global Challenges*, 47.) Her concept of relational autonomy provides a solid ground upon which the interconnectedness of individuals is made clear, as opposed to a concept of the “rugged individual” which has permeated Western discourse. As Young points out, “contemporary discourse...continues to assume falsely that all or most persons are or ought to be independent in the sense that they can rely on their own sphere of activity to support them and need nothing from others.” (Ibid.)

In practical terms, Young endorses an approach to global poverty that is much akin to the negative rights argument that Pogge makes, although she argues for a responsibility to act, rather than a strict duty. According to her, we are represented through social/political/economic institutions, and since we are a part

But Held's argument from relationships runs up against two serious problems in terms of moral motivation. The argument from an ethic of care has at its base our relationships, and from these relationships our moral motivations spring, as Robinson notes: "From the perspective of an ethics of care, it is our personal and social relations – our feelings of connection and responsibility – which motivate us to focus our attention and respond morally to the suffering of others."⁴⁸ But this brings to light the first problem: why is it that we necessarily have responsibilities to care for those to whom we are related? Noddings attempted to ground this claim about caring for others in terms of our biological disposition to care for our young. Since we naturally care for our young, we can derive an ethical imperative to care for other people to whom we relate. This however does not necessarily overcome the is/ought fallacy: just because I am biologically disposed to care for my young, why must I care for others with whom I maintain personal relationships?

It is at least possible that Held could provide a sufficient ground for her claim that we have a moral responsibility to care for those people with whom we are in relationships. But even if she is able to answer this first objection, there still exists a second (and more serious) problem with Held's argument: even if I acknowledge that I am in social relations and have a responsibility to care for those people to whom I am related, it is another matter altogether to agree that I am related in a morally relevant

of these structures, we bear a responsibility for the actions of these institutions. Thus because of our complicit participation in world structures that cause and exacerbate conditions of poverty, we all have a responsibility to act to cease such interference. Young goes further than calling this simple "interference," and claims that such structures in fact "dominate" the existence of the global poor, and it is this "non-domination" that is the core of our responsibility to the global poor. Iris Marion Young, *Global Challenges* (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2007).

⁴⁸ Robinson, 157.

sense to the global poor, who are often far away. Thus even if I claim that I should care for those with whom I am in certain relationships, there is no extrapolated imperative to care for the global poor. While I may grant care ethics the point that our responsibilities stem from our relationships to others, I still can argue against my having any real morally significant relationship to the global poor. And if I am not connected to the poor in any morally relevant way, then Held's claim that I have a responsibility thus has no force. To put it differently: I may acknowledge that I have a responsibility to care for those with whom I have a social relation. Thus I would recognize a responsibility to the global poor *if* I were socially related to them in some significant way; but since I am *not* as such related, I have no responsibility to them. They are over *there*, and I am *here*, and thus the distance between us precludes any real relationship. I may no doubt feel bad that a poor person's care needs are not met, but why am I the one with a responsibility to care for them?

This problem seriously undercuts the motivational force of Held's argument. Looking back over the other approaches, one can see that the issue of moral motivation is of great importance. Peter Singer's argument has blunt force because of the stark analogy he uses to generate our moral obligation: the poor are drowning, just like a child drowning in a shallow pond. Since you would rescue the child, you should rescue the poor by writing a check. Thomas Pogge's argument connects individual Westerners directly to the realities of global poverty; since we are actively causing conditions of poverty (a violation of the rights of the poor), we have a moral duty to right the wrongs that we have been complicit in causing.

But Held's ethic of care argument has at its base the much more tenuous premise that asks people to accept responsibility not because they are causing poverty, but in virtue of our realization that those in poverty have unmet needs and lack care. While I don't disagree with such sentiments, they appear to have less weight in terms of moral motivation than the causal connection of Pogge. It is much easier to talk ourselves out of taking on an additional responsibility than to wiggle out of a duty that we feel we already have incumbent upon us. Plenty of people can (and perhaps do) argue that they have no such feelings of "connection and responsibility" with regards to the poor of the world.

Conclusion

In the end, I argue that Held's ethic of care argument runs aground, similar to the way that Pogge's argument from human rights did. We are left with the question: "Why should I care about people so far away from me, to whom I am not related?" In addition, Held neglects to go into any significant level of detail in terms of what we must do as individuals. She is clear in arguing that we all have a responsibility to meet the care needs of those to whom we are related, and that we are related to the global poor. Robinson goes a bit further in saying that we must support actions by governments and NGOs that will create and reify connections between peoples across borders. But from here (much like Pogge), neither she nor Held gives sufficient practical details as to what we must do. We again have unanswered questions: "How much do I have to do in order to make sure that poor people are cared for, and have their needs met?" "Is it enough to donate to effective NGO's, lobby my government, vote for officials who share my concerns, etc.?" While I do not think that Held has a sufficient response to these

questions, she is certainly onto something in arguing that there is a “deeper reality of human interdependency,” much deeper than the self-reliant person thinks.⁴⁹ I agree with the importance and primacy of feelings of connection and responsibility, but in a different way (as I will discuss in the next chapter). It is too easy for people to simply say that they don’t feel such connection, no matter if they “should.”

It is true that we are dependent and interdependent beings; we have a need for other human beings in our lives in a very particular and profound way. This aspect of our humanity provides a solid cornerstone on which to construct an alternative ethical approach to global poverty, one that provides us with compelling moral motivations to respond to the impoverishment of people around the world. As I will argue in Chapter Four, we will respond in part because we recognize a connection to those in poverty, but more so because we realize that within this relationship there is something at stake for us in acting to help those people in poverty (more than just meeting the needs of other people).

⁴⁹ Held, 43. She goes on to claim that “the artificial abstraction of the model of the liberal individual is at best suitable for a restricted and limited part of human life, rather than for the whole of it.”

CHAPTER FOUR

A MARXIAN ALTERNATIVE APPROACH TO GLOBAL POVERTY

PART ONE: SELF-DECEPTION AND SPECIES-BEING

In the final two chapters, my goal (as the culmination of the dissertation) is to develop an alternative approach to global poverty. This alternative is in large part derived from Karl Marx's vision of a society of free associated producers who are developed as fully human beings. I want to stress that I am not advocating Marx's communist position *in toto*, nor am I claiming that the establishment of some version of communism would directly or succinctly lead to the eradication of global poverty. My position is that Marx's conception of human nature as species-being provides a new lens through which to approach the issue of poverty. I argue that a new Marxian approach is necessary because of something that gets passed over or neglected in current approaches of utilitarianism, human rights, and care ethics: poverty not only harms the poor, it harms every human being. Its existence forces us to live in a world in which we don't really want to live. As I will argue below, this world is in fact a non-human world. Through Marx's concept of species-being, we will be able to see just what a truly human world might look like, and to see that this world is much more than just a "world without poverty."

My argument for this alternative ethic is broken down into four major sections (spanning Chapters Four and Five):

The first section of Chapter Four revisits the problems of moral motivation that current approaches of utilitarianism, human rights, and care ethics face (which I analyzed in earlier chapters). Each ethic fails to provide a philosophically defensible argument for a motivation for individuals to contribute to poverty-relief efforts.

The second section involves developing a moral perspective based on species-being as an alternative approach. The basis of this approach is not maximizing utility, preventing rights violations, or caring for others, but a vision of what a fully “human world” would look like, which should motivate us to work towards achieving this goal not only for the poor, but also for ourselves. Thus in this section I lay out what species-being means and how a moral perspective derived from this concept differs from our current ethical perspective, as well as how it pushes us towards Marx’s vision of a fully human world in terms of free human production. This full vision provides not only a picture of a post-poverty world (and post-poverty relationships between human beings), but also a great deal of context by which we can discern the best route forward.

In order to provide this way forward towards a “fully human world,” I argue that we first need to investigate and understand the root causes of conditions of poverty around the world. Beginning in Chapter Five, the third section provides a discussion of what has caused (and/or continues to cause) the impoverishment of millions of people: a focus on labor-saving technology in production, in the interests of being “efficient.” As a result of the one-directional focus on cost efficiency, there is one key aspect being

universally denied (through various ways and means) to those who are impoverished: access to meaningful labor.¹

Thus in order to provide meaningful labor to all people (especially the poor of the world), we must revisit the roles that labor-saving technology and efficiency play in the productive process. To do so, I will incorporate the work of E.F. Schumacher and his vision of what he calls “appropriate” or “human” levels of technology, wherein the goal is not *saving* labor through the use of technology, but rather creating *more* labor (which he calls “good work”), thereby giving more human beings the opportunity to develop themselves meaningfully. In conclusion, I will focus not only on global policy and macro-movement initiatives to alleviate poverty, but also on the moral imperatives for individual human beings when faced with specific instances of poverty.

Current Problems of Motivation

To begin with, I think it is important to consider how we as human beings respond to conditions of poverty. No matter where we live, we are constantly faced with the reality that millions of human beings live in squalor around the world. Everyone is familiar with the commercials on television, focusing on the face of an ill-fed, dirty child with a heart-wrenching look upon her face, dubbed over with a narrator explaining how my donation of a meager few dollars per week can save this child’s life. This is in a sense the “macro” poverty problem with which we are faced: a realization that people across the globe are so destitute. While we do end up acting in some situations (maybe by signing up to sponsor the child on television), many times, perhaps all too frequently,

¹ As will become clear later in Chapter Five, the key here is *meaningful* labor, rather than simply labor itself. While a lack of meaningful labor for many of the poor means that they are unemployed, for others it means being employed or laboring in a way that is alienated or dehumanizing.

we do nothing at all. We change the channel, or say that we'll make sure to call to pledge next month when we have some extra money. It seems then that there is a problem with our current ethical motivation in the face of poverty: despite a myriad of efforts, poverty persists around the globe.

As I discussed in the earlier chapters, current approaches to poverty come mainly in the forms of (a) broadly utilitarian appeals like Peter Singer's (it costs us so little to help, and the poor benefit so much), (b) some appeal to human rights like Thomas Pogge's (we as a society are violating our duties to the poor, and this means each individual has a duty to change this situation), or (c) an appeal to an ethic of care like Virginia Held's (the poor have unmet needs, and we have a responsibility to care about them as a result). While I laid out many of the problems that these approaches face previously, let us revisit them in terms of the moral motivation that they provide. It seems that each argument ends up with contradictory problems of motivation.

In the case of Singer's argument, there is a double-sided problem: he appears to demand both too much and too little of us. On the one hand, taking Singer's argument to its logical conclusion means that we would have to keep giving money to the poor until by giving we would be making ourselves worse off than the poor would be. This standard ends up demanding that an individual give up most of his money to poverty relief, something seen as *too* demanding. A position that requires that I give and give and give until I am scarcely better off than the poor faces a great motivational difficulty.²

² As I discussed in Chapter One, Singer paradoxically softens his proposal in a way (in pushing people to at least give something), but he still holds fast to his simple utilitarian logic: we must give until by giving we create disutility. He acknowledges those who give some, but similarly admits that they should be giving more if they can.

However, the other side of the coin (the argument being that if *everyone* donated a part of the necessary sum, then each person's donation would be much smaller) appears to perhaps be a bit underwhelming. My modest donation of \$200 certainly is not going to "solve" global poverty. The argument that demands we cough up a small amount of money per week doesn't provide a clear path to eradicating poverty. It seems that I (and my small donation) are simply too little to make a difference, and the problem of poverty is too big. Again, this seriously undercuts the motivation for acting to provide aid. Either Singer demands too much, so I don't take his argument seriously, or his baseline target is startlingly small, and since my donation really doesn't make enough of an impact, I don't act.

Turning to the type of rights-based argument that Pogge makes, we again find moral motivation issues. As Chapter Two details, Pogge frames poverty in terms of rights violations, and connects the corresponding duties to all individuals who benefit from the economic policies of the West. In other words, individuals have a duty to change the policies that are directly resulting in the rights of the poor being violated. Much like Singer's approach, there appear to be two key motivational issues that arise: On the one hand, individuals can argue that they are not in fact responsible for the policies that their country and world leaders put into place. If I had no hand in electing these officials or pushing for these policies, an argument claiming that my moral motivation should stem from duties that are incumbent upon me seems unfounded; if I didn't cause the resultant poverty, why do I have a duty to fix it?³

³ Iris Marion Young points out the problematic nature of this question for what she calls a "liability model" of responsibility. She astutely remarks that when faced with an argument like Pogge's, "The actors

On the other hand, even if I accept that I have such a duty, an even greater motivational problem seems to arise: what does such a duty imply in terms of individual action? Pogge's prescription that we all (as beneficiaries) have a duty to change our government and its policies is particularly diffuse. What does it mean to say that I, as an individual, have a responsibility to change my government and its policies? It seems very unclear as to what constitutes a fulfillment of this duty; whether I simply must vote in an election, or I have to take up a career lobbying directly for change. In a similar vein to the issue with Singer's approach above, the perception is that the problem of government is "too big," and my little action involved with trying to change it is merely an ineffective drop in the bucket. As such, our duty is too diffuse and unclear, weakening the motivation to act.⁴

addressed hear themselves being blamed for harms. More often than not, agents who believe themselves to be targets of blame react defensively: they look for other agents to blame instead of themselves, or find excuses that mitigate their liability in cases where they admit that their actions do causally contribute to the harm." Iris Marion Young, "Responsibility and Global Justice," *Social Philosophy and Policy* 23 (2006): 124.

⁴ This critique of moral motivation that I make against Pogge's argument also holds up against Martha Nussbaum's capabilities approach as well. It is true that the capabilities approach is distinct in some ways from Pogge's human rights approach. Pogge admits such a distinction exists between a "resourcist" approach like his (a human rights approach focused on providing certain "resources" for the poor) and a capabilities approach: the former believes what individuals need "should be defined as bundles of goods or resources needed by human beings in general, without reference to the natural diversity among them. These goods might include certain rights and liberties, powers and prerogatives, income and wealth, as well as access to education, health care, employment, and public goods." (Pogge, "Can the Capabilities Approach Be Justified?" 201.) Adherents of the capabilities approach argue that the different abilities of an individual to use such basic goods to meet the goals of his life must be the starting point, rather than a list of basic goods that all humans need. Thus there is a distinction, insofar as the capabilities approach is focusing on the inherent diversity of human beings and their conceptions of a good life. (Given this distinction, Pogge goes on to argue that the capabilities approach can be philosophically justified, but that it is not superior to resourcist approaches, such as his or that of John Rawls.)

That being said, the impetus for moral motivation on the capabilities view is extensionally similar, if not identical, to that of human rights theorists such as Pogge. They (Pogge and capabilities theorists) both argue that we must stop harming poor people, and do something(s) in order to help them climb out of poverty. For Pogge, the "something" we must do is to stop violating our negative duties, and work to compensate for any ways in which we have benefitted from the active impoverishment of the poor. According to Nussbaum, we must provide aid in ways that are sensitive to a person being able to develop

Held's argument also suffers from problems in terms of generating sufficient moral motivation. As I discussed in Chapter Three, her ethic of care approach has at its base the more tenuous premise that asks people to accept responsibility, not because they are causing poverty, but in virtue of our realization that those in poverty lack care, and thus have unmet needs. The first hurdle for this argument is the possibility that a person may claim she has no feelings of connection to the global poor, and thus she has no responsibility to care as a result. But even if one acknowledges such a responsibility, the second hurdle emerges: she is left with the same questions as the interlocutor to Pogge: "How much do I have to do in order to make sure that poor people are cared for, and have their needs met?" Is it enough to donate to effective NGOs, lobby my government, vote for officials who share my concerns, etc.? As a result, Held's argument does not give a sufficient (and compelling) ground for a person's moral motivation to act.

These problems that I have detailed are critical blows to the efficacy of their respective approaches, precisely because they undercut the motivation of potential actors

her capabilities and flourish. Nussbaum argues, for example, "If basic justice requires that a person's entitlements not be curtailed by arbitrary features, then justice is ubiquitously violated in the current world order, and the bare existence of the inequality (pushing many people beneath the capability threshold) is reason enough to do something about it." (*Creating Capabilities*, 115.) Building upon this foundation in "basic justice," she moves to claim (in a manner almost identical to Pogge) that we have either caused the poverty of millions around the globe (through colonialism, robbing those people of the ability to develop their capabilities), or that we are benefitting from the global economic rules being set up in our favor.

I argue that, at best, the capabilities approach *starts* by acknowledging that institutions are set up in ways that violate our duties to the poor, and then moves to a focus on how the inappropriate distribution of resources affects a person's capability to achieve certain ends in her life. At worst, it appears to *assume* that we are morally obligated to act to end poverty, and then, based on this assumption, develops a nuanced way as to ways in which we can fulfill this obligation. I argue that this assumption is a serious shortcoming of the capabilities view; it does not sufficiently ground a moral motivation to act. In many ways, Nussbaum's argument mirrors the motivational claims of Pogge (and in such a way as to be subject to the same criticisms that I mentioned in Chapter Two and above), but it does so without giving enough of an argument as to why affluent individuals should be doing anything to contribute to poverty-relief efforts. See here Thomas Pogge, "Can the Capabilities Approach Be Justified?" *Philosophical Topics* 30 (2) 2002: 201, and Martha Nussbaum, *Creating Capabilities* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2011), 115-116.

whom Singer, Pogge, and Held are trying to persuade into helping fight global poverty.

In the face of these concerns, I now want to turn to constructing and explaining a different approach to poverty, one which will overcome these pitfalls of moral motivation, but more importantly, will be grounded in an alternative conceptual framework from which to approach the problem of poverty.

An Alternative Approach: Species-Being and Living in a “Human” World

The central concept around which I am constructing my alternative approach is Karl Marx’s conception of human nature, which he phrases as “species-being.” Before more fully elaborating species-being, let me provide a small disclaimer: I do not set out to critique a human rights approach along the lines of Marx’s critique of human rights that he puts forth in “On the Jewish Question.” There he argues that ‘abstract’ rights only occur within the context of civil society, which he sees as a basic feature of a capitalist economic system. In relation to the issue of Jewish rights, he states that mere political emancipation through granting Jews rights does not offer them real “human emancipation.” Rather, these political rights simply entrench the egoism that is generated and sustained through a capitalist economic system. So it is that he claims, “The so-called *rights of man* as distinguished from the *rights of the citizen* are only the rights of the *member of civil society*, that is, of egoistic man, man separated from other men and from the community.”⁵ The natural rights of human beings (as they operate within civil society) focus on the individual in such a way, according to Marx, that they reinforce a concept of human beings as egoists. For instance, a natural right to security, backed with

⁵ Marx, “On the Jewish Question,” *Selected Writings*, Ed. Lawrence Simon (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1994), 16 (Hereafter noted as SW; in addition I will indicate to which specific text of Marx’ I refer).

a civil right to such security, does not deal with atomistic egoism but rather reifies and guarantees that such egoism is protected. Accordingly, Marx proclaims his diagnosis of the problem of rights as follows:

Thus none of the so-called rights of men goes beyond the egoistic man, the man withdrawn into himself, his private interest and his private choice, and separated from the community as a member of civil society. Far from viewing man here in his species-being, his species-life itself – society – rather appears to be an external framework for the individual, limiting his original independence. The only bond between men is natural necessity, need and private interest, the maintenance of their property and egoistic persons.⁶

I think Marx makes a valid point here in terms of the entrenchment of a capitalist ethos in the rights that are offered. It is true that “natural rights” are often posited as a “guarantee” of the individuality of human beings, and a way to respect a need for individual freedom. In this sense, the concept of community (or species-being) is separated out at a fundamental level and replaced with egoistic concerns. I will return to species-being in more detail later.

I offer this quick discussion of Marx’s argument above to illustrate exactly upon what my argument does *not* center: My aim here is not to critique rights on these grounds, and chalk them up purely to capitalism’s hold over the ethical apparatus of our society and its approach to (for my purposes) global poverty. While Marx’s comments here in “On the Jewish Question” hint at core aspects of this truly human ethic, they do not go much further.

Speaking and Understanding a “Human Language”

Let us return to a point made above: there are noticeable problems with the way that we react when we are faced with instances of poverty around the world. But poverty

⁶ Ibid., 17.

doesn't simply confront us from across the globe on our television screens; in fact, impoverished people often confront us directly. Consider the beggars that we encounter on the street: living in Chicago, I am confronted on a daily basis with this reality. Getting off the train, leaving the bank, or walking out of my apartment I cross paths with people who are asking for money, pleading for help and compassion from strangers passing by. In order to understand what happens in these interactions, I refer to an excerpt from Marx's short piece "Free Human Production" where he argues that we do not speak what he calls a "human language":

Our objects in their relation to one another constitute the only intelligible language we use with one another. We would not understand a human language, and it would remain without effect. On the one hand, it would be felt and spoken as a plea, as begging, and as *humiliation* and hence uttered with shame and with a feeling of supplication; on the other hand, it would be heard and rejected as *effrontery* or *madness*. We are so mutually alienated from human nature that the direct language of this nature is an *injury to human dignity* for us, while the alienated language of objective values appears as justified, self-confident, and self-accepted human dignity.⁷

The beggar, in expressing his need, experiences humiliation; the one he approaches recoils in distaste. But this interaction, as Marx points out, involves a radical alienation from our species-being. What we should be recognizing as an intrinsic aspect of humanity (our universal neediness), we reject as "effrontery or madness," and our mask of individual self-reliance appears to be considered "self-accepted human dignity."⁸ We cannot utter our needs unmediated, nor can we expect a "human" response to our expression. This alienated language directly affects the way in which we relate to the poor people we encounter.

⁷ "Free Human Production," *SW*, 52.

⁸ I will provide further elaboration on these concepts of need and self-reliance in the next section.

In response to these encounters with the realities of poverty, there is a clear *human* impulse that arises in us to help. We have a genuine sense of sadness (perhaps anger) at the fact that people must live in such conditions, and it makes us want to help them somehow. While we do end up acting in some situations (maybe by handing some change to the beggar), many times, all too frequently (I will argue), we do nothing at all. Rather than providing help to the person, or at least reflecting on their undeniable neediness, we almost instinctively seek some way to explain away or suppress our initial human impulse. We conjure up several possible excuses for why our actions wouldn't really help or would be inappropriate. We tell ourselves whatever story seems to work: "She'll just buy drugs," "What good will some pennies do for her?" and so on. Another common story: we tell ourselves that these people could pull themselves out of poverty if they really wanted to or tried, so we say "This person is lazy and should just get a job." Thus in some sense we import Pogge's idea of "explanatory nationalism" and convert it into a sort of "explanatory individualism": whatever situation of poverty that these people are in is a result of their own doing, and the only reason they are not able to get out of it is because of their own laziness (or lack of action).

It is worth noting that these stories may actually be true in some instances, but they certainly aren't universal truths. For instance, the "he'll just buy drugs" story is an enormously convenient explanation that is undoubtedly true in some cases. But it is also the case that the drug addict needs to eat. Regardless, jumping from the mere possibility of their misusing our donation to a sense that this absolves us of any moral implications is

dubious. Just because they *might* buy drugs does not mean that in every case we *shouldn't* give them any kind of assistance.⁹

What is so problematic in succumbing to these excuses is that we do so without any engagement with the individual in front of us. We don't stop, talk, or many times even look at the person that asks us for help; we merely hear his plea, conjure the excuse, and never break stride. The reaction of concocting narrative excuses that occurs in these situations is extremely problematic, dehumanizing, and harmful not only to the poor person, *but also to us*.¹⁰

Our quick rationalizing reaction to impoverished people that we encounter is a perfect example of what Jean-Paul Sartre refers to as “bad faith” or “self-deception.” Rather than critically examining our knee-jerk reactions to the poor people we encounter, we lie to ourselves in a particular (and peculiar) way. This is not a standard sort of lie wherein, as Sartre points out, “the liar intends to deceive and he does not seek to hide this

⁹ There is oftentimes (at least in some situations) a certain fear factor associated with these encounters; by stopping and taking out your wallet or purse you are opening yourself up to theft (or worse). I certainly acknowledge these aspects, and would agree that such concerns should be taken into account.

¹⁰ The harm upon which I will focus is something psychological, a detriment to our humanity. This type of harm is in contrast to the possibility of direct physical harm, such as the growth of terrorism which Noreena Hertz and John Perkins discuss. In *The Debt Threat*, Hertz argues that the underhanded and destructive lending policies of the United States, IMF, and World Bank have created such hatred for the West within the developing world that it is directly leading to the rise of terrorism and anti-American sentiment. Thus her claim is that such policies are harming us insofar as they sow the seeds of anger that manifest themselves through terrorist actions that claim American lives. Similarly, Perkins in his *Confessions of an Economic Hit Man* argues that the companies involved in the infrastructure projects that such loans are focused around are swindling the indebted countries. By inflating growth potential, “Economic Hit Men” convince countries to take on loans they cannot afford to pay back, resulting in the type of indebtedness that Hertz discusses, as well as great profits for the corporations. The result is further poverty, misery, and hatred of the West among the poor. While I agree with Hertz and Perkins in saying that poverty can and does feed terrorism and is thus harming us, my argument in this chapter is distinct. The existence of poverty around the world does a distinct harm to each individual in terms of their humanity, rather than simply physically harming us as a group through terrorism. For a full discussion of their respective arguments, see Noreena Hertz, *The Debt Threat: How Debt is Destroying the Developing World and Threatening Us All* (New York: HarperCollins, 2004), and John Perkins, *Confessions of an Economic Hit Man* (New York: Penguin Group, 2004).

intention from himself.”¹¹ When we tell a standard lie, we are seeking to hide the truth from others, but not from ourselves. But in the case of bad faith, while we may outright lie to others who question our motives or inaction, more often we are trying to hide something *from ourselves* which we know, or at least suspect, to be true. According to Sartre “Bad faith...is indeed a lie to oneself. To be sure, the one who practices bad faith is hiding a displeasing truth or presenting as truth a pleasing untruth.”¹² When we encounter a beggar on the street or a starving child on television, we (oftentimes) know that we can spare some change or make a donation, and yet our first reaction is one of self-deception/bad faith. Our natural impulse is to help, but we quickly suppress it by convincing ourselves of any “pleasing untruth” that will work.

I am not arguing that in every case we are able to spare any money. Many times I in fact have no money on me when I encounter a beggar, or perhaps need the money I have for some necessity. These are not instances of self-deception, provided that we engage in some reflection on the neediness of the poor person to whom we cannot aid. But the vague excuses you make to yourself as you walk past someone, while you have a few dollars in your pocket which you know you can spare, *is* self-deception.

In his dystopian novel *1984*, George Orwell introduces essentially the same concept with his phenomenon of “doublethink”:

To know and not to know, to be conscious of complete truthfulness while telling carefully constructed lies, to hold simultaneously two opinions which cancelled out, knowing them to be contradictory and believing in both of them, to use logic against logic...to forget, whatever it was necessary to forget, then to draw it back into memory again at the moment when it was needed, and then promptly to

¹¹ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness* (New York: Washington Square Press, 1977), 88.

¹² *Ibid.*, 89.

forget it again, and above all, to apply the same process to the process itself – that was the ultimate subtlety: consciously to induce unconsciousness, and then, once again, to become unconscious of the act of hypnosis you had just performed.¹³

Even though we can provide some direct aid, we try to claim that there is no way our donation will help, or that it's highly likely that this person will squander away the dollar, rather than buy food. These are no doubt examples of the “carefully constructed lies” that Orwell mentions, which we end up in fact believing in the end. Thus when faced with conditions of poverty, we all too often put our energy into creating excuses and affecting ourselves with “bad faith,” rather than offering aid to the poor person.

Why is it that we so rapidly look for such an excuse? Why are we so apt to resort to self-deception or doublethink? Generally speaking, we do so in order to protect ourselves. Conditions of poverty (whether globally or in the form of the beggar on our doorstep) are jarring to our sense of the world, and attack our conception of ourselves as decent, moral human beings. We are forced into a sort of phenomenological paradox: we recognize that “good people” help others in need and we see ourselves as good people, and yet, when faced with a poor person in need, we refuse to help. In this respect, global poverty is doing something extremely harmful to us (and everyone); it rattles our sense of self and the world, and forces us to suppress our human instincts. In order to protect ourselves from the cruel realities of poverty, we actively suppress our humanity and try to out-manuever our human response, in the process causing harm to our being and offering no help to those in need.

¹³ George Orwell, *1984* (New York: Signet Classics, 1950), 32-33.

Patterns of Self-Deception: The Rugged Individual and the Myth of Money

Reflecting upon self-deception, such a result should give us pause. Over time, as we are repeatedly faced with the appeals of beggars, we can see that we are in fact hardening ourselves to the poverty that exists near at hand and in the world at large. We end up systematically denying our human impulses and the human connections that they signify. One manifestation of this dehumanization of our ethical mindset that is deeply imbedded in our culture is the notion of the rugged individual.

One of the major reasons for a fundamental human impulse remaining without effect when approached by a beggar is a perception of human beings as independent, “self-reliant” creatures that should depend on no one else for their survival and existence. While I offered a critique of this view from the standpoint of care ethicists in Chapter Three, I want to refocus this critique here and frame it in terms of Marx. Marx points out that within capitalism: “A being only regards himself as independent when he stands on his own feet, and he stands on his own feet only when he owes his existence to himself. A man who lives by the favor of another considers himself dependent.”¹⁴ We are inclined to see any acknowledgement of dependency on others as a grave weakness, something to be eradicated or overcome. While we may admit that we have needs that must be satisfied, the implication is that we are (or at least should be) able to satisfy them through our own means; we have (or should have) an ability to obtain the objects/property that we require.

More specifically, this independent person views human *neediness* as something to be minimized; the rugged individual is one who has few unmet needs because he has

¹⁴ Marx, “Private Property and Communism,” *SW*, 77.

the means to satisfy his needs. He sees himself as “self-reliant,” able to meet his human needs solely through his own devices. This is not to say that the self-reliant person tries to deny that he has any needs; he acknowledges that he has biological or psychological needs. Admitting this fact does nothing to tarnish his independence. What he does disavow, however, is an inherent state of neediness or dependence upon other people. This condition is held in such contempt by the rugged individual precisely because it refers to a lack of independence, an overarching reliance upon other people. Such neediness is certainly anathema to the self-reliant person.

Marx provides a splendid image to characterize the rugged individual in “On the Jewish Question,” where he notes that “Every man is equally viewed as a self-sufficient monad.”¹⁵ These self-reliant people view themselves as being independent entities, having no reason to rely upon others. The image of monads brings to mind individuals as particles that do not interrelate or depend upon each other so much as collide or come into contact out of disinterested necessity.

Of course, in contemporary society, no one can meet his own needs directly. If this is the case, it would appear that the self-reliant person would have to admit that sometimes he must turn to the aid of other people. But rather than admitting such dependence, he is able to call upon an ally, one which appears to allow him to retain his self-reliant status: money.

Money plays a critical role in promoting a sense of individualism and self-reliance that is divorced from needs and other human individuals. Money is seen as emancipating us from dependency on other people. Those individualists who see themselves as self-

¹⁵ “On the Jewish Question,” *SW*, 17.

reliant do so through the lens of money, as an abundance of money allows them to exchange with others for objects that satisfy their needs. Since one has money, he doesn't "need anyone else," per se. In a most general sense, we do acknowledge that other people must exist in order for us to survive, but we see money as providing a sufficient distance between us and them; we don't depend on these other people, nor do we give much thought to their humanity, needs, or the conditions under which they labor. Our sole concern is whether or not we are able to interact with them in a business capacity, exchanging money for a commodity to satisfy our needs. It is the distance in this exchange that Marx speaks of when he discusses the fetishism of commodities:

A commodity is therefore a mysterious thing, simply because in it the social character of men's labour appears to them as an objective character stamped upon the product of that labor; because the relation of the producers to the sum total of their own labour is presented to them as a social relation, existing not between themselves, but between the products of their labour.¹⁶

Through the exchange of money for these fetishized commodities, we are removed from any direct relation with the other human beings who produce them. Again, we only seem to acknowledge the other's existence insofar as their labor is represented in the commodities that we purchase to meet our needs. Money serves a purpose, not solely as an intermediary or go-between, but in fact as the placeholder for the other human individual. Such substitution removes us from any true relation to the other human being involved in the production of the objects to satisfy my human needs. What this substitution begets for us is the following situation: "The relations connecting the labour of one individual with that of the rest appear, not as direct social relations between

¹⁶ Karl Marx, *Capital*, Vol. I (New York: International Publishers, 2003), 77.

individuals at work, but as what they really are, material relations between persons and social relations between things.”¹⁷

It is this last phrase that echoes the beginning words in the earlier “human language” passage from “Free Human Production,” where our *objects* in their relation to one another constitute our relational language, rather than relations between free human beings/producers. Money allows us to mask our reliance on other human beings behind a façade of individualism and self-reliance. Thus Marx claims, “The need for money is therefore the true need produced by the modern economic system, and it is the only need which the latter produces.”¹⁸ Thus the rugged individual can view himself as perhaps equivalent to a frontiersman, able to secure his food, clothing, and shelter by his own unmediated efforts and labor. Of course, he knows that he is, in a certain sense, dependent upon other people, but only insofar as he needs to purchase some goods or services from them. In this admission he is not acknowledging that he’s dependent upon any particular other; rather, he spends his time engaged in a specialized form of labor, and thus does not have the time to produce everything that he needs. As a result of his labor, he earns money, which he can exchange for the goods that he cannot produce himself.¹⁹ Since the money comes from the ‘sweat of his own brow’ as it were, he still claims that he is satisfying all of his needs through his labor (either directly or indirectly

¹⁷ Ibid., 78.

¹⁸ Karl Marx, “The Meaning of Human Requirements,” *The Marx-Engels Reader*, Ed. Robert Tucker (New York: Norton, 1978), 93. (Hereafter abbreviated *MER*.)

¹⁹ Even he who makes his money *without* actually laboring still justifies his individualism in terms of labor: either he “labored” to invest wisely, or perhaps his parents worked and as a result he received an inheritance.

through monetary exchange). Money allows us to utilize it as a substitute for any recognition of a human need for others (or of any dependency upon them).

My point here is not that we need to get rid of money; rather it's that we must come to realize that the independence which money offers us is merely an illusion, sufficing only to reify an equally illusory sense of self-reliance and a lack of neediness.²⁰ The concept of speaking a "human language" helps us to understand the responses of self-deception that we have to poor people we encounter. We are deceiving ourselves to be able to ignore the neediness of those that ask for our help, and reject their pleas as "effrontery or madness." Looking at the world through the lens of the dominant ideology, when approached by a beggar, we see his need and admittance of dependence as shameful and inappropriate, as Marx notes. The self-deceiver asks himself: "If I am able to be independent and need no one's help to meet my own needs, then why can't this other person do the same?" This ideology provides us with the narratives that we utilize in deceiving ourselves. While we do so in an attempt to protect ourselves from the realities of poverty, we end up harming ourselves further by suppressing our human impulse to help. Thus the existence of poverty causes harm not only to those who cannot meet their needs, but also to those who are forced to try to avert their eyes through bad faith.

²⁰ It's not clear that Marx has any real issue with the utilization of money as a means for exchange; in fact he might acknowledge that it could function appropriately in an advanced economy. The problem he sees is the permutation of the place of money, from a recognized placeholder to a fetish whereby it becomes a need in and of itself. The picture of exchange moves from C-M-C (commodity for money for another commodity in turn) to M-C-M' (money for a commodity for a greater amount of money in the end). This metamorphosis underlies his entire critique of capitalism, as he questions how an economy where equals are exchanged for equals can beget greater value in the end. His answer, of course, comes through the alienation and exploitation of the workers via the commodification of their labor power. They labor more hours during the working day than it takes to produce the goods and services their wages will purchase. For an exposition of this critique see *Capital*, 145-153.

A “Human Language” and a “Human World”

Our current ideology, with its tendency to encourage self-deception, is clearly not the “human language” that Marx mentions; we are, as he says, “so mutually alienated from human nature” that we resort to a language that masks our neediness and replaces it with an assumed independence. In contrast to the position of the self-reliant person, if we recognize that poverty harms all people, then we are stumbling upon a realization that there is in fact a certain connection between ourselves and the poor of the world. Just as their humanity suffers by living in squalor, our humanity suffers a hardening of the heart, as we make excuses and deceive ourselves. Self-deception appears to make life easier for us, but all it does is erode our humanity and cause further harm to the world.

The power of this realization, based in Marx, is two-fold: On one level, we realize that poverty is in some way harming us through our responses of self-deception. Thus acting to provide aid to the poor has at its core something beneficial for us, insofar as we will avoid the pitfalls of self-deception. But in order to curtail the prevalence of the harms of self-deception, we have to, quite literally, change the world. Here the second level of Marx’s vision comes to bear: it is clear that the world could be changed so that we would not have to respond to the poor by deceiving ourselves. In other words, we realize that another kind of world is possible, one in which we would be able to speak the “human language” that Marx offers.²¹

Thus rather than merely trying to prevent harm, we have a much more positive vision. It is a vision of a different world, one in which people do not have to suffer the

²¹ At this point, I am speaking of another possible world in terms of the material conditions of poverty. As will become clear later, my argument is not only to claim that we can create a world without material poverty, but also that we can go beyond such a corrective, in order to create a truly human world.

inhumanities of poverty or self-deception. This provides a much stronger moral motivation to act to bring such a world into being: there are rewards for *me*, not just for those who are materially poor.

But what would a truly “human language” look like? In its simplest form, a truly human language would eliminate the alienation from which our current language suffers, and allow us to fully reconnect with our human nature. With the creation of a world where we no longer have to engage in self-deception, we would be creating a world without poverty. As such, we would be striving for a better world for everyone, the poor as well as ourselves. In working to eliminate conditions of poverty for others, we are doing something beneficial to the entire species, which not only helps “them” but also “me,” and thus “us.” Rather than following our current ethic’s focus on individualism and the dichotomy of rights and duties, I want to ground my alternative ethical approach in this more communal concept of our human nature as species-being. Self-reliance and self-deception will end up being replaced by solidarity and freely-acknowledged neediness.

The concept of a “human language” is inexorably linked to a more encompassing vision: a vision of a fully “human world.” It is certainly not the case that simply altering our language to one that is fully human (in Marxian terms) will bring about the end of poverty. My claim is that philosophical reflection on this idea of a “human language” allows us to imagine not only a fully human language, but also a different and fully “human” world. Within this human world, human beings would be able to speak and understand a “human language.” Thus the existence or establishment of a fully human

language necessarily points towards the existence or establishment of a fully human world.

I want to reiterate and make clear that I am *not* arguing that we must necessarily supersede capitalism in order for this fully human world to come to pass. I leave open the question of whether or not this fully human world is possible under capitalism. It is no doubt true that realizing this vision under capitalism would necessarily entail many substantive changes in our current ethos and economic structures (as I will argue later in Chapter Five), but I do not want to discount this possibility.²² Regardless of whether or not this vision of a fully human world is possible under capitalism, I argue that it is nevertheless morally compelling.

So what would a fully human world look like? It is certainly a vision of a world without poverty, but it is in fact much more. It would not simply be a world in which no one has to live on less than \$2 per day. It would be a world in accordance with our nature, one where we do not have to harden ourselves against the reactions of this nature. Thus we could have a world wherein we don't attempt to suppress our human instincts, but rather celebrate and develop our human nature.

Vision of a Fully "Human World"

So what kind of world does Marx, particularly in his early writings, enable us to imagine? In the following sections I will discuss four major aspects of this fully human world.

²² A Swedish social democratic capitalist system, for instance, may be suitable as an example of a way in which our economic system could remain capitalist, but be sufficiently altered along Marxian human terms.

Human Nature as Species-Being

To begin with, a fully human world would be one in which all human beings have approximated their nature. Marx's term for our shared human nature is *species-being*.

His conception of human nature is an Aristotelian or Platonic conception of human nature, where a being's "nature" is its potential, its ideal form. This ideal is a conception of the positive possibilities inherent in us.²³

What does Marx mean by "species-being"?

Man is a species-being not only in that he practically and theoretically makes his own species as well as that of other things his object, but also – and this is only another expression for the same thing – in that as present and living species he considers himself to be a *universal* and consequently free being.²⁴

This conception of species-being is meant to distinguish us from other animal species.

As human beings, we are able to conceive of ourselves as individual beings that can identify with and empathize with any other member of our species. We can also think of our species as a whole, taking pride in "our" accomplishments and perhaps finding a sense of shame where we have failed. Take for instance scientific accomplishments, such as landing a man on the moon, or perhaps the evolution of global struggles for political democracy, women's rights, and against racism (although these are certainly not fully

²³ Marx's conception of human nature is in many ways different from contemporary views of human nature as a limiting factor, denoting our natural behaviors. One such example is a conception of human nature that tends to emphasize human beings as "fallen," a result of our moral weakness and propensity for evil. On this view, our human nature restricts the behaviors of human beings. For example, proponents of capitalism often argue that alternatives to capitalism will not work, insofar as they don't take into account supposed facets of human nature such as self-interest or greed. That being said, I am not drawing a clear dichotomy between the Marx's view of human nature and a limiting/restrictive view of our natural behaviors. Rather, I argue that Marx's view of human nature allows us to embrace both aspects: while we may or may not be naturally predisposed to certain behaviors, Marx's vision is more focused on our capabilities and potential for what we could possibly be.

²⁴ Marx, "Alienated Labor," SW, 62.

achieved, and thus more problematic): when relating to these movements, we see them as accomplishments of humanity as a whole, and thus they elicit feelings of pride insofar as we feel that the species is bettering itself.

Another element of species-being which delineates us from animals involves our freedom and creativity in production. Drawing on his Hegel-inflected historical materialism, Marx posits human beings as productive creatures that adapt consciously and creatively to changes in their environment: “The practical creation of an *objective world*, the *treatment* of inorganic nature, is proof that man is a conscious species-being.”²⁵ This is the basic “character” of our species: laboring to create objects to meet our human needs.

Of course animals also build shelters and obtain food in order to survive, but there is an important distinction between humans and animals in terms of nature: while animals produce only because of immediate physical need, humans by nature produce in another way. Instead of always producing for our immediate needs, Marx argues that we produce “universally,” and thus are “free.” Although the requirement to produce material goods in order to survive is a constricting force upon us, we do not produce solely for mere survival purposes. Animals are only able to produce according to the “standard and need of the species to which it belongs while man knows how to produce according to the standard of any species and at all times knows how to apply an intrinsic standard to the object. Thus man creates also according to the laws of beauty.”²⁶ In our freedom in

²⁵ Ibid., 63.

²⁶ Ibid., 64.

terms of production, we are not bound solely by the patterns of life that are biologically handed down to us.

There are a few ways that this freedom is made manifest. In the context of sports and athletics, for example, we take up these pursuits because they meet some needs of leisure and entertainment, but we also have a fascination with humans' physical abilities; we strive to push humanity and its accomplishments to the limits. Technological endeavors such as space exploration have some survival motivations, but are more focused on developing our relation to the natural world even further than we previously thought possible. As a unique species-being we are able to improve upon the ways in which production takes place, or in fact invent new objects and processes altogether. We are able to see birds in flight, set ourselves to discovering if this is possible for us, and work to produce such a result. Similarly, when we labor to produce works of art, music, or literature, we do so not merely to meet survival needs, but more to enrich and further develop ourselves, both as individuals and as a species. Marx claims that this phenomenon is a movement wherein we are transcending our "natural needs" and developing what he refers to as truly "human needs."²⁷

Another way in which our freedom and creativity in production becomes clear is in our social organization. Unlike other species, we are able to consciously alter our social structures and the conditions under which production occurs. We make changes to the political and economic structures of our society based on the productive results and the needs of our community (both individually and collectively). Over the course of

²⁷ I will say more on what he means by "natural needs" and "human needs" below, and later will return to the example of art and its place in production and the development of species-being as it points towards a further conception of developing ourselves as fully human.

human history we have organized subgroups of our species into hierarchies, patriarchies, monarchies, oligarchies, democracies, and so on, altering the character of our social organization when necessary (to varying degrees of success).²⁸ With all of these instances, we as a community were aware of our social organization, and able to imagine such structures as being arranged differently. Thus it is that our species-being involves a conception of what is possible for us to be as human beings, and the environment which we can construct.

This image of our nature (species-being) as a robust freedom to alter the way in which our world is organized is, I think, a particularly powerful one. Given the unprecedented development of our productive forces (our creativity as a manifestation of our species-being), it is not necessary to live in a world where there is such poverty. We as a species are in fact capable of creating a different world. We could live in a much more humanized world, one in which the capacities of our species-being are much further developed (both in an individual and collective sense).²⁹ So to begin with, a fully human world would be one in which we all recognize our human nature as species-being.

²⁸ Even the idea that we could change the social structure of our community is a human development. As human communities have developed, we have been able to compare our social organization to that of other groups, and imagine the possibility of altering ours as a result.

²⁹ Martha Nussbaum, in developing and advocating the capabilities approach, corroborates Marx's account of our nature as based in an Aristotelian concern for human flourishing; in order for individual human beings to flourish, they need to be able to develop particular aspects of their humanity. With explicit reference to Marx's account of human nature as species-being, Nussbaum argues that if our human facets and senses aren't cultivated in a "fully human way – by which I think he [Marx] means a way infused by practical reasoning and sociability," then we are not flourishing in terms of being human. She goes on: "The core idea is that of the human being as a dignified free being who shapes his or her own life in cooperation and reciprocity with others, rather than being passively shaped or pushed around by the world." (*Women and Human Development*, 72.) Thus by nature we develop ourselves not only through our own individual actions, but in relationships and cooperation with other members of our species.

Nussbaum points out that since this concept of flourishing is an aspect of being human, it appropriately applies to all human beings, and thus it can be applied across national and cultural borders

Human versus Natural Needs

Marx claims that we produce to satisfy our material needs, but also that our nature makes us able to transcend such a focus on producing only to survive. He characterizes the productive process of our species-being as follows:

The first historical act is thus the production of the means to satisfy these needs, the production of material life itself. This is a historical act, a fundamental condition of all history which must be fulfilled in order to sustain human life every day and every hour.³⁰

Moving forward from this act of satisfying needs:

The second point is that once a need is satisfied, which requires the action of satisfying and the acquisition of the instrument for this purpose, new needs arise. The production of new needs is the first historical act.³¹

To better understand this historical act of need satisfaction and production, it is necessary to examine Marx's distinction between two different types of need: natural needs and human needs. Marx calls these needs that must be satisfied for the basic maintenance of human life "natural needs." In and of themselves they are not crude or

(which she does in applying the capabilities approach to the issue of global poverty). At the same time, she refrains from offering a "comprehensive account of value" or the good life, as she wants to continue to be sensitive to cultural concerns. Thus in her latest work *Creating Capabilities* she argues that her capabilities approach "focuses on the protection of areas of freedom so central that their removal makes a life not worthy of human dignity." (*Creating Capabilities*, 27). Cf. Martha Nussbaum, *Women and Human Development* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 70-80, and also Martha Nussbaum, *Creating Capabilities* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2011).

³⁰ Marx, "German Ideology," SW, 115.

³¹ Ibid., 115-116. It is worth noting that Marx appears to contradict himself a bit here: he refers to two distinct things as the "first historical act." In the first quote, he claims that the first historical act is producing to satisfy our natural survival needs. In the second quote, he argues that after satisfying these needs, new needs arise, and this production of new needs constitutes the "first historical act." I think this can perhaps be sorted out by denoting the process of moving from natural needs to human needs (in its entirety) as the "first historical act." Marx appears to break the two apart, but if we take them as one process, he seems to be referring to the same thing. Regardless, this oddity is not of great consequence to my argument. It might be noted that this part of "The German Ideology" was never published in Marx's lifetime; when publication plans for the latter two parts fell through, this portion of the manuscript was abandoned. Thus the manuscript read today is not a final, polished version, and it is possible that Marx would have corrected this apparent contradiction prior to publication.

merely practical, but instead simply natural aspects of human existence, as “Life involves above all eating and drinking, shelter, clothing, and many other things.”³² These natural needs are oriented to a finite end, our continued existence, and thus constitute a sort of drive. It is this finite aspect that demarcates our natural needs; their satisfaction is enough to keep us alive.

At the same time, this sense of continued existence is only our species-being in a minimal sense. Their fulfillment alone is not enough to develop our species-being, thus not enough to make us fully human. Satisfying our natural needs is necessary for a full realization of humanity, but it is by no means sufficient. We begin as a species by laboring to satisfy the natural needs that we have in virtue of our physical condition. In doing so, we move beyond our natural needs and in fact end up creating *new* needs. This development of new needs leads not to more natural needs, but rather to a new kind of need, a “human need.” Marx offers the relationship between man and woman as the paradigm example of this development of human needs:

The immediate, natural, necessary relationship of human being to human being is the *relationship of man to woman*. In this *natural* species-relationship man’s relationship to nature is immediately his relationship to man, as his relationship to man is immediately his relationship to nature, to his own *natural* condition. From this relationship one can thus judge the entire level of mankind’s development. From the character of this relationship follows the extent to which *man* has become and comprehended himself as a *generic being* [species-being], as *man*; the relationship of man to woman is the *most natural* relationship of human being to human being. It thus indicates the extent to which man’s *natural* behavior has become *human*...In this relationship is also apparent the extent to which man’s *need* has become *human*, thus the extent to which the *other* human being, as

³² Ibid.

human being, has become a need for him, the extent to which he in his most individual existence is at the same time a social being.³³

Thus we can judge the development of our species-being by how much our natural needs have been superseded by the creation of truly human needs. But what does this mean? What are “human needs”? A fully human world will be one in which our needs have truly been humanized, and we will be focused on creating more, rather than less, of them.

According to Marx, human needs have a direct connection to species-being, as our fulfillment of them involves striving for our fullest potential as human beings. We can think of these human needs, at least in part, as what John Stuart Mill refers to as the “higher pleasures or faculties” of human beings. In his essay “Utilitarianism” Mill distinguishes between the higher and lower pleasures of which human beings are capable:

Human beings have faculties more elevated than animal appetites, and when once made conscious of them, do not regard anything as happiness which does not include their gratification...there is no known theory of life which does not assign to the pleasures of the intellect, of the feelings and imagination, and of the moral sentiments, a much higher value as pleasures than to those of mere sensation.³⁴

In some ways similar to Marx’s natural needs, lower pleasures are physical pleasures fulfilled through food, drink, etc. On the other hand, higher pleasures are those we seek that take us beyond mere survival and promote a higher *quality* of life. Mill identifies pursuits such as art, music, and literature as examples of these higher pleasures.

This analogy with Mill provides a clear link to our unique nature as species-being: fulfillment of natural needs provides the baseline for survival, whereas fulfillment of

³³ Marx, “Private Property and Communism,” *SW*, 70. An important note on translation: where Simon’s translation reads that man has “comprehended himself as a *generic being*,” both Tucker’s translation as well as that of Erich Fromm read that man has comprehended himself as “species being.” See Tucker, *MER*, 83, and Erich Fromm, *Marx’s Concept of Man* (New York: Continuum, 1994), 126.

³⁴ John Stuart Mill, “Utilitarianism,” in *On Liberty and Other Essays*, Ed. John Gray (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 138.

human needs involves going beyond survival to the quality of our existence.³⁵ To live a life in which we feel the most fulfilled, complete, or satisfied, we must focus on meeting needs that affect the quality of our life. While meeting natural needs allows us to survive, the fulfillment of a human need directly affects the quality of our existence, and pushes us towards a more developed sense of our species-being.³⁶

The question then remains as to what it is that can be the object of our truly human needs. Marx agrees with Mill insofar as art, music, literature, and philosophy are certainly prime examples of human needs. These higher pleasures become the human needs of everyone under true communism (a truly human world). At the same time, Marx identifies what he claims is the primary human need, the recognition and fulfillment of which allows us to pursue and fulfill our other truly human needs: a need for “human” interaction with other people.

To more clearly illustrate our need for other people as our highest human need, let us consider the example noted previously: the relationship between man and woman.³⁷ This relationship can and does exhibit both levels of need (natural and human). In terms of a natural need, we need a partner for sexual or procreative reasons, something involved in species survival and existence. At the level of a human need, however, our need for a

³⁵ Erich Fromm reframes Marx’s distinction, and refers to ‘true’ and ‘false’ needs. The former are our natural and human needs, whereas the latter are synthetic needs that are created by capitalism. See here Fromm, *Marx’s Concept of Man*, 60-63.

³⁶ In her work *The Theory of Need in Marx*, Agnes Heller argues that the development of our human needs and species-being is currently warped in capitalism, as all of our needs are reduced to crude needs of survival, and our natural needs are molded into pure consumption for survival, rather than human enrichment. See here Agnes Heller, *The Theory of Need in Marx*. (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1976), especially 27-30 and 40-42.

³⁷ While Marx focuses specifically on man/woman, this example is meant to elucidate the relationship of attachment (both physical and emotional) between partners and this I think can be interpreted regardless of sex.

partner is not merely one of physical desire, but rather a need for contact and love in order to fully humanize us. This relationship opens up our individual existence through social interaction, developing us as species-being, the “us” being each partner in the relationship individually as well as a member of the species.³⁸

What does it mean to say that we have a human need for another person? This need for others comes to bear on two distinct (and unequal) levels: in one sense, we have a need for others because we depend upon them for survival, and must relate and exchange with them in order to obtain the objects necessary to exist. But in terms of a human world, our connection is in fact much stronger: we don’t just depend upon others for our physical survival; we *need* them in order to make our lives better. In order to fully develop individually in terms of species-being, we require interaction, input, and aid from other humans.

In fulfilling our need for others under capitalism, Marx argues we disregard this view of others as a truly human need and instead treat them as a mere means to satisfy our natural needs:

Every man speculates upon creating a *new* need in another in order to force him to a new sacrifice, to place him in a new dependence, and to entice him into a new kind of pleasure and thereby into economic ruin. Everyone tries to establish over others an *alien* power in order to find there the satisfaction of his own egoistic need...Private property does not know how to change crude need into *human* need...Every real or potential need is a weakness which will draw the bird into the lime.³⁹

³⁸ Marx’s statement is interesting, especially from a feminist perspective, as he claims one can judge the level of a society’s development by looking at the social status of this partner relationship, and how *truly human* it has become. In the closing words of her landmark work *The Second Sex*, Simone de Beauvoir invokes this very passage from Marx that I quoted above, and remarks: “The case could not be better stated.” Cf. Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1952), 731-732.

³⁹ Fromm, *Marx’s Concept of Man*, 140-141.

Rather than utilizing this “alien power” to satisfy our “crude” needs, we must enter into a relationship with other humans, a relationship which further develops both us and the other person in terms of species-being. Our need for others is thus critical to our human development, and the key to achieving our human nature.

Wealth and Poverty

It is this focus on creating and celebrating our level of human needs that points towards the third key aspect of a fully human world: an alteration in our concepts of the “wealthy” person and the “poor” person. More specifically, to achieve this world we must alter our perception of human neediness; we must stop minimizing it, and instead acknowledge and celebrate neediness (and the multitude of human needs) as a recognition of our humanity. According to Marx, this alteration takes the form of a change in our understanding of wealth and poverty, which we currently view as polar opposites:

It is apparent how the *rich man* [in a human society] and wide *human* need appear in place of economic *wealth* and *poverty*. The rich man is simultaneously one who *needs* a totality of human manifestations of life and in whom his own realization exists as inner necessity, as *need*. Not only the *wealth* but also the *poverty* of man equally acquire – under the premise of socialism – a *human* and thus social meaning. [Poverty] is the passive bond which lets man experience the greatest wealth, the *other* human being, as need.⁴⁰

This vision of communism (Marx’s fully human world) is not one of “crude communism,” whereby everyone is *leveled down* to the status of a poor worker; mere equality of wages or position does not in any way achieve what Marx envisages:

Universal *envy* establishing itself as a power is only the disguised form in which *greed* reestablishes and satisfies itself in *another* way...Crude communism is only the fulfillment of this envy and leveling on the basis of a *preconceived* minimum.

⁴⁰ Marx, “Private Property and Communism,” *SW*, 77.

How little this overcoming of private property is an actual appropriation is shown precisely by...the reversion to the *unnatural* simplicity of the *poor* and wantless man who has not gone beyond private property.⁴¹

The point that Marx makes turns out to be crux of the movement towards a fully human world. In order to bring about such a world, we focus not on crass “equality” of wages, or simply redistributing money in order to meet everyone’s *natural* needs; rather, the focus must be on realizing and promoting our *human* needs. Crude communism only aims at making everyone equally wealthy or poor (a position that is often incorrectly ascribed to Marx).

Consider now an alteration of “rich” and “poor” that will better accord with our truly human needs. Marx contrasts the meaning of “rich” and “poor” under capitalism with “rich” and “poor” under communism. Under capitalism, “rich” references a state of self-reliance, wherein a person can meet all of his needs either by direct labor or through money that he has accumulated, and thus he is not “inappropriately needy.” But having needs or being needy is an indelible part of our human nature, and the existence of needs is an indelible aspect of our nature as species-being. Currently we push any recognition of a dependency on others behind a pseudo-independence founded on money: “Self-denial, the denial of life and of all human needs, is [the] cardinal doctrine [of capitalism].”⁴² We work as hard as possible to wash away any possible level of neediness we may have, and in doing so we alienate ourselves further and further from

⁴¹ Ibid., 69-70.

⁴² Marx, “The Meaning of Human Requirements,” *MER*, 95. In some sense, those who are rich do not necessarily deny *all* of their human needs; they patronize the arts, eat gourmet food, etc. And yet while they try to cultivate these human needs, they do so without recognizing the importance of such needs for *all* people. In addition, they often fulfill these needs as if they were natural needs, through the consumption of such things as commodities.

our true humanity. The myth of self-reliance has convinced us that one can be totally independent, and that our nature requires no necessary connection to (and thus no dependence upon) others. Although the “rich” may have the means/private property to satisfy his wants and desires, he glosses over the most important fact: his human needs depend upon other people for their satisfaction. Under communism, the meaning of “rich” will be fundamentally altered to align with the fact of inherent human neediness. Rather than “rich” denoting self-reliance and a minimization of neediness, it will proceed from a sense of being “rich in needs”; in other words, the rich person is one who has many human needs that must be met through his sensuous activity, as well as the activity of others. This characterization of wealth and ‘being rich’ will be changed to recognize the existence of human needs that everyone has.

Marx argues that our perception of “poverty” will change as well. Under capitalism poverty is a negative circumstance, a situation to be avoided at all costs; it denotes a total inability to meet one’s human needs. The rich person in capitalism looks down upon those lacking in the ability to provide for themselves; they are inappropriately needy. By contrast, Marx argues that “poverty” should instead denote our recognition of our dependency upon other people. In “poverty,” we recognize the mistake of self-reliance, insofar as we see that as humans we must necessarily depend on other people. Therefore, rather than wealth and poverty being opposites, as they are under capitalism, a fully human person is in fact both rich and poor: he is “rich” in his abundance of human needs, and “poor” in his conscious realization of his dependence on others for the development and fulfillment of these needs. In a truly human world, we recognize our

human need for and dependence upon others as an intrinsic aspect of our humanity. As the final aspect of a human world will make clear, our human need for others involves depending upon them to help make us fully human by emancipating our senses.

Emancipation of the Senses

For most individuals today, our senses are far from “emancipated.” According to Marx, capitalism has crippled us in this particular way:

Private property has made us so stupid and one-sided that an object is *ours* only if we have it, if it exists for us as a capital or is immediately possessed by us, eaten, drunk, worn, lived in, etc., in short, *used*; but private property grasps all these immediate forms of possession only as *means of living*...Hence *all* the physical and spiritual senses have been replaced by the simple alienation of them *all*, the sense of *having*.⁴³

Marx notes that our sense of need in our current ethic has been warped; the use of money convinces us that the satisfaction of any need involves owning and possessing an object. Our needs are to be satisfied through the appropriation of objects to ourselves (via monetary exchange), and this appropriation and hoarding involves possession of external objects. While Marx is in some sense exaggerating for effect, he is still pointing to something that is very real and true today. For example, we only consider a book “ours” if we purchase it and can place it on our shelf for display, rather than when we read it, enjoy it, and are affected by the contents with which we come into sensuous contact. The “need” for a book is not considered a need to read the words and absorb the content (as art, literature, or science), but rather a need to purchase the book and see it as our own, privately and exclusively. Such has become the view of humans and their relation to needs: needs are conditions of ourselves which we seek to eradicate through

⁴³ Marx, “Private Property and Communism,” SW, 74.

consumption. We annihilate our need for books, films, music, and works of art by purchasing a DVD or CD and crossing them off of our wish list, rather than celebrating our need for such things as a human need for sensuous experience through the medium of art. A need for these kinds of experiences is reduced down to concerns of property, ownership, and consumption, and the value of commodities is determined by relations between objects, rather than human individuals.⁴⁴ In this way, the needs of our senses are not truly humanized; in fact, our sensuous needs, which *should* be our truly human needs (those higher pleasures for art, literature, relationships, love), end up becoming mere consumption needs, akin to our natural survival needs. This leaves us “stupid and one-sided” insofar as we end up being only *natural* beings, not truly *human* beings. Such a situation severely constricts our sensual relation to the world; Marx scoffs that “*sense* subordinated to crude, practical need has only a *narrow* meaning.”⁴⁵ Having our senses stranded at this point of underdevelopment seriously stunts our human development, leaving us only partially or “crudely” human.

Yet Marx’s point here is not meant to be damning, but rather empowering: “human nature had to be reduced to this absolute poverty so that it could give birth to its inner wealth.”⁴⁶ There is, then, another possibility for our relationship to the objects of our needs that can free us from this one-sided obsession with having and owning. “The overcoming of private property means therefore the complete *emancipation* of all human

⁴⁴ The existence of a market for original works of art underscores this point, as the “art market” has valued the experience of owning an original work and possessing it exclusively. For example, in the recent news headlines, Edvard Munch’s *The Scream* sold for a record \$119 million at auction.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 75.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 74.

senses and aptitudes.”⁴⁷ But what could this mean to say that to become fully human we must “emancipate” our senses? Marx explains:

The *human* eye appreciates differently from the crude, inhuman eye, the human *ear* differently from the crude ear, etc...the *senses* of social man *differ* from those of the unsocial...The *development* of the five senses is a labor of the whole previous history of the world...[However] the care-laden, needy man has no mind for the most beautiful play. The dealer in minerals sees only their market value but not their beauty...Hence the objectification of the human essence, both theoretically and practically, is necessary to *humanize* man’s *senses* and also create a *human sense* corresponding to the entire wealth of humanity and nature.⁴⁸

To humanize us, our human need for (and dependence upon) other people comes to the forefront; only when we realize this need and celebrate our “poverty” in that regard can we open ourselves up to the human transformation that can be brought about through our relationships with others. More specifically, we depend upon others and our relationships with them to deepen our sensuous interactions with the world.

Take for example a specific sensuous interaction: viewing El Greco’s *El Entierro del Señor de Orgaz* (*Burial of the Count of Orgaz*); looking at it for the first time (with a “crude, inhuman, practical” eye) can mean little. Without any explanation of the meaning and significance of the work, I can appreciate it as being creative, colorful, or an intricate work. But when another human being is able to explain the fullness of the work (the religious iconography, the political figures included and their significance, the intimate detail of each figure’s gaze), my senses are suddenly transformed from the crude

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

to the human; the painting has in fact become beautiful and meaningfully human.⁴⁹ The emotional response that it invokes is *mine*. Without having to steal the painting or hang it in my living room, I have owned and consumed it, insofar as it has elicited a truly human response within me. This human response can only be generated through a social relation with other human beings, who can in fact “make the painting beautiful” for me. The same can go for a piece of music, as Marx argues: “From the subjective point of view, as music alone awakens man’s musical sense and the most beautiful music has *no* meaning for the unmusical ear...the *senses* of social man *differ* from those of the unsocial.”⁵⁰ At first listen, a Tchaikovsky composition can be enjoyable for the beat or instrumentation, but once someone explains the significance behind it, the light switch may flip on inside our head; suddenly the piece can turn from technically enjoyable to “beautiful.” My senses have thus become humanized, and attuned to the experience in such a way that the music fulfills my truly human need. Moreover, we are speaking here “not only [of] the five senses but also the so-called spiritual and moral senses (will, love, etc.).”⁵¹

For a fully human person, the objects that satisfy our needs are not simply commodities to be consumed, but rather objects necessary for a realization of our full humanity. We must have not only basic goods like food or water, but also music, art, and

⁴⁹ I chose this example as it was personally and *humanly* meaningful for me; I have visited the chapel where it resides in Toledo, Spain, and have a print of it on my wall. Friends that come to our apartment often remark on how striking the painting is, but once they listen to me explain the intricacies of El Greco’s work, they in turn are able to experience it as something beautiful and thus meaningfully human. It’s worth noting that I didn’t purchase the print to “consume” the work, but rather because the original work so sensuously affected me that it became an expression of my identity, and hanging a print on my wall allows me to represent this to others in some way.

⁵⁰ “Private Property and Communism,” SW, 75.

⁵¹ Ibid.

literature. We need them not just to consume, but also to enjoy, in order to be a fully human person. According to Marx, by overcoming capitalist modes of production, our relation to the objects of our labor (and the objects of the labor of others) changes insofar as we will view these objects as the embodiment of our sensuous activity. Thus it is that he says “The positive overcoming of private property – that is, the *sensuous* appropriation of the human essence and life, of objective man and of human *works* by and for man – is not to be grasped only as *immediate*, exclusive *satisfaction* or as *possession*, as *having*. Man appropriates to himself his manifold essence in an all-sided way, thus as a whole man.”⁵² This represents a fundamental shift in our recognition of our humanity; only through our relations with other people can our needs become truly human needs, and only by recognizing and focusing on our human needs can we become fully human, a “whole” person.⁵³

A Compelling Vision of ‘Selfishness’

We can now see just what, in Marx’s view, a fully human world would look like. It would be a world in which everyone is “rich in human needs,” and since the greatest of these needs is the need for others, we are all aware that we are fundamentally dependent on others for the richness of our lives. In addition, our senses have been emancipated.

⁵² Ibid., 73.

⁵³ In my view (and presumably Marx’s as well), virtually *all* human beings have the innate capacity to be “rich in human needs,” and to have their senses emancipated. This view of human beings as equally able to be humanly affected has a great deal of scientific support. Brian Barry, in his *Why Social Justice Matters*, spends a significant amount of time detailing exactly how changes (both negative and positive) in the early environment around a fetus or infant can have marked effects on the child’s development. “The more we learn about the power of the early environment, the more plausible it becomes that, in the absence of some definite neurological deficit, all children have the same cognitive potential” (51). Rather than different people simply being “better” than others in an innate sense, environmental conditions end up causing many different biological changes. As such, all people are innately capable of being fully developed in terms of species-being. See here Brian Barry, *Why Social Justice Matters* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2006), especially 46-70.

Given the recognition of our species-being and the central place accorded to our human needs, we have transcended our alienated language and in fact are speaking a truly human language. This world is clearly something far greater than simply a world without material poverty (a lack of basic goods necessary for survival); it is in fact a world without the “human poverty” that Marx saw within the confines of capitalism.

Such a vision suggests an approach to the problem of global poverty that is distinct from current approaches, as it is positive rather than negative in nature. In addition to explicating how grim of a state the world is currently in and focusing on getting rid of such dreadfulness, Marx’s vision is a positive statement about the future. Reflecting on a fully human world can make us realize just how good things could be, not only for those who are materially poor, but for *everyone, ourselves included*. Currently we are forced to eviscerate our humanity through self-deception in order to cope with the poverty that confronts us in our daily lives. Given this self-inflicted violence, we end up “impoverished” in an altogether different way than a mere lack of basic goods.

An alternative ethical approach based in Marx’s vision of a fully human world pushes us to respond and help other people in poverty for a morally distinct reason: helping ourselves. Instead of a motivation that can be seen as simply altruistic, we are in fact trying to stop the harm that is also being inflicted upon us. In this way, we are doing something that is not only good for others, but also “good for us,” and thus “selfish.” I don’t mean selfish in a tainted or egotistical way, but insofar as we realize poverty is harming us as well. Of course, a moral approach where our impetus is that some action is “good for me” has often been viewed as selfish, and thus negative. Kant for example

argues that we should act in accordance with our moral duties for the right reasons, rather than for anything resembling self-interest.⁵⁴

What this view overlooks is that in working against poverty, we are not acting only for our individual selves, but rather for “us.” The Marxian approach I have set forth evokes a sense of solidarity with other human beings, and therefore our “selfish” concerns are not only focused on their effects on our individual selves, but also on others with whom we identify. If I give a few dollars to a homeless person who asks me for money on the street, my action benefits him (by helping him purchase what he needs) *and* me (by allowing me to heed my human impulses, and keeping me from succumbing to self-deception). In this way, I am giving him money to help “us,” instead of “me” or “him/them.”⁵⁵ Within a fully human world such actions allow the “us” to include both myself and other human beings, and thus self-interested motivations aren’t atomistic, but are instead focused on helping all of us together.

On my view, our acting to help those in poverty should be generated not from a sense of duty/obligation to the poor (thus avoiding the “guilt-trip” approach of Singer, Pogge, or Held), but rather a reflection upon our connection through species-being, and

⁵⁴ This “right reason” for Kant is simply the fulfillment of our moral duties, which rational beings should simply do with a “cheerful disposition” because it is the right thing to do. For Kant, our actions are moral only insofar as we are following our rational duties dictated by the Categorical Imperative. Cf. Immanuel Kant, “Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals,” *Practical Philosophy*, Ed. Mary Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1999), 37-108, and “The Metaphysics of Morals,” *Ibid.*, 353-604.

⁵⁵ There is an interesting empirical corollary to my claim here. As Judith Lichtenberg discusses, several experiments focused on persons’ likelihood for helping others have shown that the chances of a person providing aid to someone in need rise greatly if the benefactor in question recently experienced good fortune. In one such experiment, for example, a person exiting a phone booth was more likely to help a passerby (a confederate of the experimenter) who dropped a sheaf of papers if he had found a dime in the coin return slot of the telephone. Lichtenberg’s discussion brings to light an important issue about moral psychology, and the importance of my proposal about “selfishness.” See here Judith Lichtenberg, “Famine, Affluence, and Psychology,” in *Peter Singer Under Fire*, ed. Jeffrey Schaler (Chicago: Open Court Publishing, 2009), 244-245.

the recognition that poverty directly harms not only the poor but us as well. We realize that conditions of poverty force us to suppress our human urge to help, and force us to live in a less-than-desirable world, one where so many people live in poverty. We want to live in a different kind of world, wherein each person can develop himself/herself as a certain kind of person, a fully human person who is able to interact with others in a human way, helping all of us to become fully human. Our “selfish” motivation is therefore a motivation founded in our solidarity; I act for “us,” not simply for “you” or for “me.”

CHAPTER FIVE

A MARXIAN ALTERNATIVE APPROACH TO GLOBAL POVERTY

PART TWO: A FULLY HUMAN WORLD VIA INTERMEDIATE TECHNOLOGY

In Chapter Four, I connected the harms of global poverty directly to all human beings, poor and rich alike. When faced with the neediness and pleas of a poor person, we harden ourselves against our human impulse to help through self-deception. In concocting the stories which we tell ourselves, we are causing a serious harm to ourselves: we damage our humanity and our nature as species-being. On the other hand, when we act in accordance with this nature as species-being, we are doing something not only for the poor person that we encounter, but also for ourselves. We are heeding our human impulses to help, recognizing our own “poverty” in terms of our need for other people, and at the same time acknowledging the human needs of another person.

Thus grounding our human nature in Marx’s concept of species-being begets a vision of “selfishness,” which in turn provides us with a compelling moral motivation for acting to provide aid to the poor of the world. In helping, we are doing something that benefits “us,” not just “them.”

As I discussed at the end of the last chapter, this fully human world is much more than just a world without poverty; it is a world wherein each individual works to develop herself as a fully human person, one who is “rich in human needs.” Given our nature as

species-being, we work towards meeting the needs of all people in ways that develop all people as fully human.

But what must we do in order to bring about this world? In this last chapter, I turn to the question of how our world can be changed into one along the lines of Marx's vision of a "fully human" world. First, I will examine a critical facet of our human nature as species-being that Marx emphasizes: our human need for meaningful labor. This is something that I will argue is passed over in the approaches of Singer, Pogge, and Held, but is of vital importance in addressing the causes of global poverty. As I will argue, our current economic system is *not* set up in order to produce meaningful labor for all, but rather to be economically efficient. Given the worship of such efficiency in the productive process, labor-saving technology has often been uncritically adopted. This technology is instituted in the interests of being economically efficient, but it does so by denying meaningful labor to many people, resulting in the rampant and ever-expanding conditions of poverty present in our world.

It is this aspect of our world (and our economic structures) that I argue must be altered if we are to bring about a fully human world. In order to provide meaningful labor to all people (especially the poor of the world), we must revisit the roles that labor-saving technology and monetary cost efficiency play in the productive process. Relying on the work of E.F. Schumacher and his vision of what he calls "appropriate" or "human" levels of technology, I will argue that we must critically examine the role that labor-saving technology plays within our world, and utilize technology not in order to be

efficient, but rather in order to provide a world in which all human beings have access to meaningful labor. This fully human world will not only allow us to meet the needs of all human beings (thus solving the problem of global poverty), but also allow everyone to develop themselves in accordance with their nature as species-being.

A World without Poverty?

For Marx, the establishment of such a human world necessarily involved capitalism being superseded by communism. He saw communism as superior to capitalism in two distinct ways: it would eradicate the great material poverty that capitalism could not overcome, and secondly, it would provide the proper environment by which all people could develop their human needs and hone their senses to become fully human.

Whether or not Marx was right that communism would provide the fertile ground for such positive developments is beside the point here. I want to pose a different question: can we develop a fully human world within the context of our current global structures? Put differently, and in a most general sense, is a world without poverty possible?

This is a serious question; an affirmative answer is neither nonsensical nor utopian. It is not the same as asking “Can I keep myself from dying?” or “Can I make everyone in the world happy all of the time?” The former is certainly nonsense; no matter how much I wish to stave off death, I cannot create a world wherein such is the case. Similarly, the latter question is utopian in its childish naivety; it’s quite impossible to make everyone “happy” all of the time.

But there is plenty of evidence to suggest that it is possible to alter our world and its economic, political, and social structures in such a way that the result is a world where material poverty does not exist. In Chapters One and Two I mentioned the quantifiable data that Singer and Pogge have brought to bear on their respective arguments, showing that through philanthropy or structural alterations, we could very easily generate (or reallocate) enough money and resources to aid the global poor.¹

These realities make it clear that the problems and causes of global poverty are structural, rather than physical. We produce enough goods to meet the needs of everyone, and yet we end up with a world in which a small minority has an incredible abundance, and almost half of all humans have little to nothing. Poverty is a contingent fact of the world, not a necessary one. Unlike the concept of death or varying human emotions, there is no inherent reason why poverty must exist in the world.

The question then becomes: how do we eradicate global poverty? Are there changes that could be brought about which would not only ensure that the basic needs of everyone are met, but also make our world more fully human? There is another facet of our human nature emphasized by Marx that has particular practical salience in terms of the question of poverty and how to combat it: our human need for meaningful work.

¹ The work of Jeffrey Sachs goes a long way in clearly illustrating and echoing the statistical information that Singer and Pogge put forth. In the chapter of his book *The End of Poverty* entitled “Can the Rich Afford To Help The Global Poor?”, Sachs points out how little in extra taxation it would cost the United States to elevate its level of foreign aid to meet the U.N. prescribed Millennium Development Goals (which, although they will not eliminate poverty, at least endeavor to cut it by half). For the full argument, see Jeffery Sachs, *The End of Poverty* (New York: Penguin, 2005), 288-308.

Meaningful Labor versus Alienated Labor

Marx's conception of human nature as species-being is a conception of humans as productive creatures. We must labor in order to produce objects that will satisfy our needs. But, according to Marx, labor has another role to play in *human* life:

Labor, *life activity*, and *productive life* appear to man at first only as a *means* to satisfy a need, the need to maintain physical existence. Productive life, however, is species-life. It is life begetting life. In the mode of life activity lies the entire character of a species, its species-character; and free conscious activity is the species-character of man. Life itself appears only as a *means to life*.²

Marx asserts that labor functions at a higher level for human beings, beyond just satisfying basic survival needs; labor can transform us into more fully human creatures. Thus it is that labor is both an instrumental means to meet other needs, but also a need in and of itself, in accordance with our species-being. Labor is more foundational than instrumental for human beings; it is, as Marx has it, our "species character." In the act of working, we not only produce objects but also develop ourselves as individuals and members of our species.

Furthermore, this labor has a distinctly human quality to it; human beings perform such labor in a way that goes beyond merely physical, animalistic workings of the body:

We pre-suppose labor in a form that stamps it as exclusively human. A spider conducts operations that resemble those of a weaver, and a bee puts to shame many an architect in the construction of her cells. But what distinguishes the worst architect from the best of bees is this, that the architect raises his structure in imagination before he erects it in reality...He not only effects a change of form in the material on which he works, but he also realizes a purpose of his own that gives the law to his *modus operandi*.³

² Karl Marx, "Alienated Labor," in *Selected Writings*, Ed. Lawrence Simon (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1994), 63. (Hereafter noted as *SW*; in addition I will indicate to which specific text of Marx' I refer.)

³ Karl Marx, *Capital*, Vol.1 (New York: International Publishers, 2003), 174.

For Marx, truly human labor involves the imaginative and creative faculties of the human mind, in conjunction with the physical and manual processes. Erich Fromm nicely ties together this sense of labor as foundational with development as species-being:

Labor is the self-expression of man, an expression of his individual physical and mental powers. In this process of genuine activity man develops himself, becomes himself; work is not only a means to an end – the product – but an end in itself, the meaningful expression of human energy: hence work is enjoyable.⁴

In this way, productive labor is not a necessary evil of life; rather it is the way in which human beings interact and shape their world, and in turn shape their humanity. Tracing Marx's influences back through Hegel and Goethe, Fromm points out how in Marxian terms "man is alive only inasmuch as he is productive, inasmuch as he grasps the world outside of himself in the act of expressing his own specific human powers."⁵ The fully human person is actively shaping her world and her consciousness by laboring and producing objects that satisfy human needs. For a person to be fully human, she must labor and feel that she is in some way a productive being, engaging in stimulating sensuous activity that is worthy of human time and effort.

As I noted in Chapter Three with reference to the work of care ethicists, not *everyone* can labor. Children, the elderly, and the mentally and physically handicapped are oftentimes unable to labor to meet their own needs. But, while depending upon the labor of others for survival is a fact of human existence, spending one's whole life unable to find some way to labor productively (in the absence of any outstanding impairment) is

⁴ Erich Fromm, *Marx's Concept of Man* (New York: Continuum, 1994), 41-42.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 29.

particularly detrimental, and in fact dehumanizing. Such a situation denies a person of the ability to experience an enhancement of his own humanity through his own productive/meaningful labor. Kant makes this point when he argues that “life is the faculty of spontaneous activity, the awareness of all our human powers. Occupation gives us this awareness... Without occupation man cannot live happily. If he earns his bread, he eats it with greater pleasure than if it is doled out to him.”⁶

I will refer to this level of productive, truly human labor as “meaningful labor,” insofar as it is the way in which people assert their humanity and develop their species-being capabilities. Through meaningful labor we interact with the world, exercising our freedom, interrelating with other people, and humanizing our senses. Meaningful labor thus becomes a human need for us, the fulfillment of which serves to further develop our species-being.

And yet if we pause for a moment, we can see that the description of labor offered above sounds *nothing* like the activity that much of the world engages in when they “work.” The concept of work as “enjoyable” seems perhaps a bit out of place when taken in the context of the type of labor that most individuals are forced to endure. Indeed most of the world spends their time toiling in ways which few of us would call “meaningful labor,” let alone “enjoyable work.”

Marx agrees that a great deal of what could (or should) be meaningful labor has turned instead into what he calls “alienated labor.” He characterizes such activity as follows:

⁶ Immanuel Kant, *Lectures on Ethics* (New York: Harper Torchbacks, 1963), 161.

The worker does not affirm himself in his work but denies himself, feels miserable and unhappy, develops no free physical and mental energy but mortifies his flesh and ruins his mind. The worker therefore feels at ease only outside work, and during work he is outside himself. He is at home when he is not working and when he is working he is not at home. His work, therefore, is not voluntary, but coerced, *forced labor*.⁷

Because of the increased reliance on of so-called “labor-saving” technology as capitalism developed, a great deal of the labor opportunities available (jobs) involve humans being forced into repetitive, stressful work that only involves the rote manipulation of machines. While overall labor-time may end up being saved, the quality of the labor involved is often sacrificed. Such work in no way taps into the creative human faculties, or allows for any growth or introspection on the part of the human laborer.

Fromm provides a succinct characterization of alienation and its harmful effects on the human person:

Alienation (or ‘estrangement’) means, for Marx, that man does not experience himself as the acting agent in his grasp of the world, but that the world (nature, others, and he himself) remain alien to him. They stand above and against him as objects, even though they may be objects of his own creation. Alienation is essentially experiencing the world and oneself passively, receptively, as the subject separated from the object.⁸

By laboring in this way, we are not meeting our truly human needs. Instead, we are passively transformed into commodities ourselves, as our productive abilities are bought and sold, and the objects we produce are not ours to own. “Labor not only produces commodities. It also produces itself and the worker as a commodity.”⁹

⁷ Marx, “Alienated Labor,” *SW*, 61-62.

⁸ Fromm, 44.

⁹ Marx, “Alienated Labor,” *SW*, 59.

Without any creative aspect to labor, a person simply becomes an “appendage of the machine,” a mere cog in the productive process, rather than a creative force that transforms raw materials into objects that satisfy human needs.¹⁰ Such labor conflicts with our humanity as species-being and our human needs. Within our current economic system, labor has become “not the satisfaction of a need but only a *means* to satisfy other needs.”¹¹ Rather than seeking out labor to satisfy our human needs, individuals in today’s society view labor as something to be minimized and avoided whenever possible. Marx notes that the alienation of labor is “obvious from the fact that as soon as no physical or other pressure exists, labor is avoided like the plague.”¹²

“Free Human Production” in a Fully Human World

A great deal of the labor performed in the world today is of the alienated variety, rather than anything resembling meaningful labor. This dichotomy between alienated and meaningful labor not only provides insight into a significant cause of global poverty, but also points to a promising solution.

Before considering the relationship between labor and global poverty, let us consider one final piece of Marx’s fully human world, wherein he offers a picture (albeit a brief one) of what he calls “free human production.” In his “Excerpt Notes of 1844,”

¹⁰ Although the term “alienated labor” appears infrequently in Marx’s later writings, the underlying idea remains. In *The Communist Manifesto*, he and Engels write that “owing to the extensive use of machinery and to division of labour, the work of the proletarians has lost all individual character, and, consequently, all charm for the workman. He becomes an appendage of the machine, and it is only the most simple, most monotonous, and most easily acquired knack, that is required of him.” Marx and Engels, “The Communist Manifesto,” SW, 164.

¹¹ Marx, “Alienated Labor,” SW, 62.

¹² Ibid.

Marx offers a vision of a “four-fold affirmation of humanity,” occurring in a society where meaningful labor is available to all:

Suppose we had produced things as human beings: in his production each of us would have *twice affirmed* himself and the other. (1) In my *production* I would have objectified my *individuality* and its *particularity*, and in the course of the activity I would have enjoyed an individual *life*; in viewing the object I would have experienced the individual joy of knowing my personality as an *objective, sensuously perceptible, and indubitable* power. (2) In your satisfaction and your use of my product I would have had the *direct* and conscious satisfaction that my work satisfied a *human* need, that it objectified *human* nature, and that it created an object appropriate to the need of another *human* being. (3) I would have been the *mediator* between you and the species and you would have experienced me as a reintegration of your own nature and a necessary part of your self; I would have been affirmed in your thought as well as your love. (4) In my individual life I would have directly created your life; in my individual activity I would have immediately *confirmed* and *realized* my true *human* and *social* nature.¹³

This passage provides a description of how fully human persons will relate to each other as they labor within a fully human world. First, in laboring I am exercising my freedom and my creative faculties. Secondly, as the object of my labor satisfies the needs of a human person other than me, I can feel a sense of satisfaction in knowing that my labor fulfilled its *telos* by creating an object that satisfied a human need. Third, this productive relationship helps me and the other person recognize our human need for others and their labor; I end up functioning as the “mediator” between the sensual world and the other person, and for this the other person is grateful. Both of us recognize and celebrate our mutual dependence. Finally, this interaction means that I am confirming and furthering my own nature as species-being, making me fully human.

This is a picture of what production should look like, according to Marx. Rather than a picture of alienation, whereby structures of domination wedge their way between

¹³ “Free Human Production,” *SW*, 52-53.

human persons, Marx offers a vision in which the producer and the consumer/“needy” person have an actual relationship that benefits both of them in a human way.

Taken as a whole, Marx’s picture of a fully human world offers us a great deal that can be directly applied to the problems of global poverty. An alternative ethic of species-being suggests ways in which we might alter certain fundamental features of our world in order to avoid the harms of desensitization and self-deception that result from our encounters with the poor.

It is interesting to note that Albert Camus, a fierce critic of the “rational terror” of Marxism, pays tribute to this key dimension of Marx’s thought:

The very core of his theory was that work is profoundly dignified and unjustly despised. He rebelled against the degradation of work to the level of a commodity and of the worker to the level of an object. He reminded the privileged that their privileges were not divine and that property was not an eternal right. He gave a bad conscience to those who had no right to a clear conscience, and denounced with unparalleled profundity a class whose crime is not so much having had power as having used it to advance the ends of a mediocre society deprived of any real nobility. To him we owe the idea which is the despair of our times – but here despair is worth more than any hope – that when work is a degradation, it is not life, even though it occupies every moment of a life. Who, despite the pretensions of this society, can sleep in it in peace when they know that it derives its mediocre pleasures from the work of millions of dead souls? By demanding for the worker real riches, which are not the riches of money but of leisure and creation, he had reclaimed, despite all appearance to the contrary, the dignity of man.¹⁴

Marx’s vision of a human world points in particular to what must be done if we are going to adequately address the problem of poverty (both material and “human” poverty): given the centrality of labor to human life, we must create a world that is essentially free of “involuntary unemployment,” and, going even further, a world in which all have access to genuinely meaningful work. If this goal can be achieved, then

¹⁴ Albert Camus, *The Rebel* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1956), 209.

the material poverty of others around the world, as well as the “human” poverty into which this forces all of us, can be eradicated.

The Causes of Poverty

Singer, Pogge, and Held’s Neglect of Meaningful Labor

As I noted earlier, it seems that the possibility of a world without material poverty is not incomprehensible; in fact, it seems quite clear that the existence of material poverty is in no way a necessary aspect of our world. But my argument goes beyond simply correcting conditions of material poverty, and moves instead towards a vision of a fully human world. What then can be done to turn the *possibility* of a fully human world without poverty into a *reality*? Let us revisit Singer, Pogge, and Held and examine their proposed solutions, paying attention to the ways in which labor plays (or does *not* play) a role.

It seems clear upon reflection that Singer’s approach doesn’t actually focus on getting us to a world without poverty. Instead, he focuses on reducing the misery and suffering that result from conditions of poverty. Singer wants the greatest number of people fulfilling their obligation and sending the highest amount of money to poor people as often as they can.

The outcome (to borrow Singer’s famous image) is thus that we step in and save those who are drowning whenever we witness them in the pond. Rather than changing the world so as to make drowning a thing of the past, we must just be ready to muddy our clothes as many times as is necessary to pull out those drowning. Singer’s approach appears to be a mere change in distribution, rather than any real structural critique. In an

interview with the New Left Project, Singer states: “Let’s stop worrying about inequality of wealth and income, and see if we can do something to produce a distribution of income and wealth that leads to less misery and premature death than the present distribution. That shouldn’t be too difficult.”¹⁵

As I discussed in Chapter One, Singer doesn’t directly address the causes of poverty, focusing instead on defending a moral imperative to provide aid. This means we are working to bail water out of a boat which still has in it a massive hole, so to speak. We don’t end up in a world without poverty, just one in which the worst off aren’t so bad off anymore (at least for the time being).

Pogge moves further in the right direction of a positive vision, as he identifies what *isn’t* the cause of poverty: explanatory nationalism. In this I think he is absolutely correct; affluent countries are willing to make the poor worse off by give them much less of a chance to be competitive in the global market. In addition, free trade ends up making the poor less competitive in their own markets. Pogge’s proposals (such as ceasing agricultural subsidies and the Global Resources Dividend) are in one way much more in tune with the realities of poverty; he is correct in claiming that we are “hunger’s willing executioners.”¹⁶

But there remains a divide between these proposals and the root causes of poverty. In the case of the GRD, Pogge makes a solid case as to how it may provide relief for the poor, but he does not clearly establish how this policy will stop people from violating their duties to the poor going forward. Similarly, ceasing the resource and

¹⁵ Peter Singer, interview by Edward Lewis, “Ethics and the Left,” *newleftproject.org*, March 16, 2010.

¹⁶ Thomas Pogge, *World Poverty and Human Rights* (Maldon, MA: Polity Press, 2002), 24.

borrowing privileges may provide some headway in the struggle against poverty, but will their disappearance allow poor countries and their people to necessarily climb out of poverty? If we stop actively impoverishing people, we will at least be taking our foot off of the throats of millions. But this argument in and of itself doesn't lend itself to any direct structural correction to or prevention of the problem. In addition, the situation is worse for Pogge; he explicitly endorses "free trade," which can and does have very negative implications for the poorest of the world (as I discussed in Chapter Two).

Held's approach suffers from the same deficiencies as Pogge's, as she supports some of the same policy proposals, such as ending national farm subsidies. Held does, however, go beyond Pogge, focusing on structural issues, such as the culture of masculinity and its effects on the domination of poor people. While she is moving further in the direction of the causes of poverty, she does not go far enough in establishing precisely how these structures are manifest in the lives of the poor. She is correct to point out that poor people are marginalized, but she does not make the further move to establish exactly *how* and *why* they are marginalized (as I will attempt to do in the following section).

The approaches advocated by Singer, Pogge, and Held will not "end" poverty, so much as mitigate existing misery – a worthy goal, but insufficient.¹⁷

¹⁷ I also find the capabilities approach similarly "insufficient," particularly as it is developed in the work of Martha Nussbaum. Nussbaum does not incorporate enough of Marx's view of human nature to push a capabilities approach towards recognizing a need for meaningful labor. Nussbaum notes Marx's claim that we actively shape our environment, but she neglects to incorporate the key element in how Marx claims we do such active molding: through labor. It is not enough to make the negative point that we are not passively shaped by our environment; the positive point is the crucial one, whereby we actively shape our humanity and our environment through laboring to produce objects to satisfy human needs. She notes that by nature we focus ourselves on "activity, goals, and projects," but does not push this further to the underlying facet of labor, which is necessary for any of these aspects to come out. By neglecting this

Unemployment, Alienation, and Efficiency

The fundamental reason why the three approaches above are inadequate to the task of creating a world without poverty is that they begin with an insufficient analysis of the causes of poverty. In other words, they are missing something: they have both glossed over the effects that a *lack of meaningful labor* has on the poor people of the world.

At the most basic structural level, conditions of poverty spring not from inequalities in wealth or access to markets; these are concurrent symptoms of the problem, but are caused by much deeper problems regarding labor. Massive amounts of poverty can be linked directly to unemployment. In many cases, people around the world are living such impoverished lives because they are unable to find appropriate ways to labor productively. Although precise data on unemployment in developing nations is extremely difficult to obtain, the World Bank estimates upwards of 30 percent of workers in some of the poorest developing nations are technically unemployed (without a job).¹⁸ But such “involuntary” unemployment is far from the only cause: most those who are able to find work are confined to scratching out a living via subsistence agriculture, while

positive point, Nussbaum’s capabilities approach runs up against a problem: it does not explicitly accord a place for a basic capability of productive labor, or access to it. In her list of capabilities, she talks of labor, but only in an instrumental role, or only in terms of employment. She mentions that the capability of “Control over One’s Environment” involves “having the right to seek employment on an equal basis with others,” and that the capability of “Affiliation” involves “in work, being able to work as a human being, exercising practical reason and entering into meaningful relationships of mutual recognition with other workers.” A focus on employment is very much distinct from actual (meaningful) labor, and thus Nussbaum does not appropriately argue for a (human) need for meaningful labor for all human individuals. See here Martha Nussbaum, *Women and Human Development* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 79-80, and also Martha Nussbaum, *Creating Capabilities* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2011), 33-34.

¹⁸ World Bank, *World Bank World Development Indicators 2011*, data.worldbank.org/data-catalog/world-development-indicators, 50-55. Precise data is difficult to obtain, especially in agricultural sectors, because of factors such as seasonal workers, child labor, and informal labor.

the rest are forced into sprawling urban slums where they find only jobs that entail long hours and excruciating physical toil for very little pay. (Sweatshops are the obvious example here.) According to the International Fund for Agricultural Development, “At least 70 percent of the world’s very poor people are rural, and...over 80 percent of rural households farm to some extent.”¹⁹ Despite being in a position to produce goods to satisfy their own needs, these rural farmers are still confined to abject poverty. These available jobs (either in sweatshops or menial subsistence agriculture) are indicative of a lack of what I am calling meaningful, un-alienated, or *human* labor.

Singer, Pogge, and Held all discuss poverty relief and its connection to money in the form of transnational aid, but none of them focuses on the issues of unemployment or the nature of the work that great numbers of the poor are forced to endure. Singer moves at a somewhat superficial level, avoiding structural critiques. Thus the causes of poverty are framed simply in terms of material deprivation. Pogge and Held do point to structural issues related to terms of trade and resources, but do not delve deep enough. While stopping subsidies perhaps restores the pure market aspect to global agricultural production, it does nothing to deal with the issue of scale; huge corporate producers in the U.S. can still cheaply export goods to developing nations, which can still serve to undercut the feasibility of small farming for local producers. Thus Pogge and Held are not properly approaching the issue of labor, which undercuts the efficacy and appropriateness of his proposals.

Also (and perhaps more importantly), neither Pogge’s nor Held’s proposals address labor itself. Focusing on providing a more ‘level’ capitalist playing field or

¹⁹ International Fund for Agricultural Development, *Rural Poverty Report 2011*, www.ifad.org/rpr2011, 3.

establishing connections of care across borders do nothing about the nature of work and how commodities are produced. The issue is not just that poor farmers cannot compete, but also that the way in which goods are produced does not lend itself to many people working, but rather a few.

Behind such vast unemployment and alienation in labor (as causes of poverty) are the attitudes with which labor itself is viewed by society and individuals. Contemporary society seems to view labor in a somewhat ambivalent sense. On the one hand, some people spend as much time working as possible; they push their unhealthy obsession to the point of even checking work-related email while on vacation (Americans seem to be the paradigm case here). In some cases this is motivated by a fear of unemployment in the face of the current economic crisis, while others see any deviation from this lifestyle as sinfully idle. On the other hand, people often complain about having to spend a significant portion of their time engaged in labor activities. In the interest of trying to spend less time laboring (and thus more time in leisure activities), humans (here I am speaking generally, in terms of society) are constantly trying to invent and utilize labor-saving technology. Such innovations allow goods to be able to be produced faster and with less direct human labor. This in and of itself is not especially problematic; Marx himself sees leisure time as beneficial. In principle, increased utilization of technology in the productive process means we as a society require less labor to produce a given product, and thus the benefits of such increased technological “productivity” have been a mostly unquestioned assumption over the last two hundred or so years. Technology that literally “saves labor” has been viewed as an undeniably beneficial thing. Innovation

which allows more goods to be produced with less labor is in fact how “productivity” is defined in economic terms, and thus the growth of such productivity is good. By implication, “productivity growth” could mean that workers enjoy the same standards of living while spending less time working, thanks to technology.

And yet, this has in no way come about; in fact, the opposite is true. What has resulted from the rampant utilization of labor-saving technology is that many workers have lost their jobs. Those workers who are able to retain employment must work at a greater pace to keep their jobs (and wages), or that the labor they engage in has been reduced to the alienated labor of machine manipulation.

It is worth briefly examining the negative *human* effects of unemployment. Amartya Sen makes a very important point about employment, specifically about the effects of *losing* that employment. When someone is unemployed or can’t find work, their life is negatively affected in a myriad of ways:

If income loss were all that were involved in unemployment, then that loss could be to a great extent erased – for the individuals involved – by income support. If, however, unemployment has other serious effects on the lives of the individuals, causing deprivation of other kinds, then the amelioration through income support would be to that extent limited. There is plenty of evidence that unemployment has many far-reaching effects other than loss of income, including psychological harm, loss of work motivation, skill and self-confidence, increase in ailments and morbidity (and even mortality rates), disruption of family relations and social life, a hardening of social exclusion and accentuation of racial tensions and gender asymmetries.²⁰

²⁰ Amartya Sen, *Development as Freedom* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 94. Sen makes this point to bolster his capabilities approach, insofar as he claims this approach to poverty takes into account the inherent diversity of human well-being, and the different aspects of poverty. Rather than just augmenting the income of a poor person, Sen argues we must enhance his abilities to achieve certain goals within his life.

In times of unemployment, people feel dehumanized. They feel as if they have nothing to offer the world; their sense of personal worth and value within their family takes a huge blow. Human beings link their sense of personal identity very closely to the type of labor in which they engage.²¹ It isn't simply a lack of income that upsets the world of an unemployed person (although that clearly is a negative impact), but also the assault on his sense of self-worth and humanity. We don't work merely to obtain a wage, but also to experience ourselves as human beings, productive creatures who labor in response to the needs generated by our environment. For the poor of the world who are unable to labor, their humanity suffers for reasons beyond a simple lack of money. They are told by society that there is nothing of worth that they can contribute. Given that unemployment is clearly a terrible thing, causing damage far beyond mere loss of income, it is not at all obvious that the social gains from labor-saving technology (cheaper items for consumption) are worth the human losses.

The standard economic response to this dilemma is to assert that those who are unemployed (as a result of labor-saving innovations) are only made so temporarily, and that most will undoubtedly find suitable employment elsewhere in time.

Yet there is a problem here: this apparent tendency of a high-unemployment and high-labor-saving-technology economy to rebound may be in fact an accidental feature, in no way inherent to the structure of our current economic system. While many of the

²¹ Writing in *The Atlantic*, Don Peck goes to great lengths to detail this link between identity and work, particularly in the wake of the massive unemployment during the "Great Recession." Especially for men, their identity as provider and head-of-household is challenged and eviscerated as they are unable to find work over an extended period of time. As he argues, the recent financial crisis will have far-reaching effects on American society, specifically in terms of the psychological and emotional well-being of those affected. See here Don Peck, "How a New Jobless Era Will Transform America," *The Atlantic* (March 2010), 42-56.

great technological innovations of the last century have created more jobs than they destroyed (at least in rich countries), this outcome is not at all clear in relation to more recent technologies.²² Take for example the automobile: while its innovation certainly put some people out of jobs (horse and buggy services, a decrease in railroad patronage), the number of jobs that resulted far exceeded any such losses. Not only were there factories to build cars, but also shops for upkeep, a system of roads and highways to be built, businesses that sprang up along those highways, etc., all which generated vast opportunities for employment. But the proliferation of computer technologies in recent years appears to have had the opposite effect: factory workers, service representatives, and shop owners have all been pushed out because their labor can be “saved” from the productive process. Once they are out of work, it is not at all clear that the general economy is able to conjure up new areas of employment. In addition, the necessary infrastructure for new information technology requires less human labor to operate and maintain, and therefore displaced workers are not necessarily guaranteed new “operator” jobs.²³ Thus there may not be a necessary or automatic connection between the labor-saving potential of a technology and any positive effects on overall employment.

²² Marx cites the stark effects of such technological innovation on cotton weavers in colonial India, as compared to the effects on weavers in Britain: "When machinery seizes on an industry by degrees, it produces chronic misery among the operatives who compete with it. Where the transition is rapid, the effect is acute and felt by great masses. History discloses no tragedy more horrible than the gradual extinction of the English hand-loom weavers, an extinction that was spread over several decades, and finally sealed in 1838... On the other hand, the English cotton machinery produced an acute effect in India. The Governor General reported in 1834-1835: 'The misery hardly finds a parallel in the history of commerce. The bones of the cotton-weavers are bleaching the plains of India.'" Marx, *Capital*, 406-407.

²³ This is a point made in some detail by Jeremy Rifkin in his book *The End of Work*. While there will be (and have been) new technologically-intensive opportunities for employment, their numbers are not sufficient enough to offset the job losses in the industries I mention above. In today's workplace, one person with a computer can often do the work which previously required the physical (or perhaps mental) labor of many more actual human beings. Rifkin was originally writing in the mid-nineties during the rise

It is worth taking a step back and critically assessing the role that technology plays in production, especially in relation to human labor. Here it is worth incorporating what Andrew Feenberg refers to as a “critical theory of technology.” On this view, technology that is utilized within a society comes within the context of the social and political structures under which that society operates.²⁴ Accordingly, technology is not “value neutral,” but instead echoes the values of the specific societal systems. Feenberg argues that “The values of a specific social system and the interests of its ruling classes are installed in the very design of rational procedures and machines even before these are assigned specific goals.”²⁵ Thus technology is not a “rational destiny” that societies move inexorably towards, but rather a scene of struggle between different possibilities and values.

Of course technology isn’t solely determined or adopted because of how well it fits into the logic of the dominant political/social systems; it has to work. Its utilization must provide some functionality that is lacking otherwise. Even so, Feenberg is correct in observing:

of the internet, and given the evidence of the last fifteen or so years, his prognostications have been playing out correctly. See Jeremy Rifkin, *The End of Work* (New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1995), 32-34.

²⁴ Feenberg situates his critical theory of technology as somewhat of a middle ground between what he calls “instrumentalist” and “substantive” theories of technology. The former takes technology as necessarily value neutral; a given technology is simply a tool or process that reflects a movement towards universal rational truth, and thus has no inherent relation to any given social context. On the other hand, substantive theory denies the neutrality of technology, and instead claims that technology is value-laden, and its incorporation into a given society inexorably leads to structures of domination. While Feenberg’s position is much closer to a substantive theory, insofar as he does argue that technology is not value-neutral, he does not agree that therefore technology is necessarily a form of inescapable domination. This substantive view echoes the work of Herbert Marcuse in *One-Dimensional Man* and Horkheimer and Adorno in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. For a more detailed description of these positions, see Andrew Feenberg, *Transforming Technology: A Critical Theory Revisited* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 5-6.

²⁵ Ibid., 14-15.

But it is not merely because a device works that it is chosen for development over many other equally coherent configurations of technical elements. Were that the case, then by analogy one could also explain the choice of individual sentences in speech by their grammatical coherence. *The social character of technology lies not in the logic of its inner workings, but in the relation of that logic to a social context.*²⁶ (Emphasis mine)

Utilizing Feenberg's insights, we can see that our current version of capitalism contains within it a logic that links the technology utilized with a clear social context and goals. More specifically, the argument in favor of the adoption of new labor-saving technologies contains a key assumption: that in most cases, a healthy productive enterprise wants to minimize the amount of labor spent to produce commodities, because doing so is "efficient." By efficiency, I am not talking about technical efficiency (allocating resources properly so as not to be wasting raw materials in the productive process), but rather *monetary cost efficiency* in production. The concern is for putting the least amount of money necessary into the productive process in order to garner the highest possible monetary return.²⁷

Producers and corporations prize efficiency above all else, and are willing to sacrifice almost anything in order to produce goods at less cost. Since labor is a cost, it must be brought to a minimum level in the productive equation. The driving force behind this reduction to efficiency is clearly an interest in returning the highest rate of profit at all times. When calculating future expenditures on labor in terms of hiring/keeping on workers, raising pay, or decreasing working hours, the vetting process always boils down

²⁶ Ibid., 79.

²⁷ Going forward, I will refer to "monetary cost efficiency" simply as "efficiency." The force of "monetary" cannot be understated here; all variables in the productive equation are calculated in terms of money, whether its up-front capital investment, technical output, or labor costs. Thus on this equation, if a worker can do the same job while being paid less, there is no change in the technical efficiency measure, but the worker is paid less, and thus is it more efficient in terms of monetary cost.

to the question: how will this affect our rate of return on investment? Any variable input into this formula that deviates from this structure is deemed an unacceptable (inefficient) expense. If my company can make something more cheaply, the current economic climate tells us that we should do so (and perhaps must) because of the cost reduction and profit growth. Any firm that employs less-than-maximally-productive technology is considered guilty of the ultimate economic sin: inefficiency.²⁸

This maniacal worship of efficiency and the technology implemented are very much informed by the social and political mores of the ruling class, rather than in any way being “value-neutral.” The interest of profit maximization is the driving force behind the vast implementation of labor-saving technology. The structured logic of our current system has turned efficiency into an end in itself. Labor-saving technology in this case is *always* a good thing (provided that it is cost effective). This means either the same amount of workers produce more goods at the same labor cost, or it takes fewer workers to continue the current level of production. Put more bluntly, to be efficient you need to minimize labor costs; this puts some people out of work if labor-saving technology can do the same job for less, but employing people to do work that machines can do more cheaply is not something to be considered.

Such a concern for efficiency, while not new, has clearly exploded as a result of the global market that has developed over the last few decades. Prior to this era of globalized capitalism, such an overzealous pursuit of efficient production at the cost of labor was constrained by the physical limits of technology and the power of the labor

²⁸ My point is not simply that efficiency is sought after for some abstract reason, but rather that the cost savings are considered paramount. In addition, many times competitive pressures force a firm into trying to be maximally efficient, as otherwise they are unable to compete and survive in the marketplace.

movement. Since the marketplace for goods consisted of the working class, many of whom were a given company's employees (think 1950s United States here), companies ended up providing labor and wages that allowed for an adequate standard of living for their employees. This relationship was a reciprocal one, and could be described as the closest to Adam Smith's ideal sense of mutually interested (or perhaps disinterested) parties. If the company laid off too many workers or allowed working conditions and wages to become unlivable, no one would be able to purchase the products made, and thus no profits resulted.²⁹

Instead, in today's economic climate the relation between companies and their workers has become one where efficiency is the bedrock. The ever-expanding global marketplace has erased this small community relationship between companies and their employees, and replaced it with an entirely different paradigm: one where efficiency has been coupled with a sense that unemployment can exist at levels that are "socially acceptable." In their work *Full Employment Abandoned*, William Mitchell and Joan Muysken claim (echoing my argument in the earlier part of this chapter) that community and social interconnectedness have been replaced in society by rugged individualism. They argue that unemployment has shifted from a problem caused by macroeconomic (societal) mistakes to a problem caused by individual mistakes and inaction.

²⁹ This tenuous but functioning relationship between producers and workers in the 1950s is well summed up by Benjamin Barber: "Once upon a time, in capitalism's more creative and successful period, a *productivist* capitalism prospered by meeting the real needs of real people. Creating a synergy between making money and helping others (the Puritan Protestant formula for entrepreneurial virtue), producers profited by making commodities for the workers they employed – a circle of virtue that, while it involved elements of risk-taking for producers and exploitation of workers, benefited both classes and society at large." For further elaboration, see Benjamin Barber, *Consumed* (New York: Norton, 2007), 9-10.

In today's society, Mitchell and Muysken claim, the unemployment rate is viewed as a reflection of individual, voluntary, and utility-maximizing choices. In other words, "Anyone who is unemployed is now considered to have chosen to be in that state because they have not invested in appropriate skills, have not searched effectively for available job opportunities (in some cases have not searched at all), or have become overly selective in the jobs they would accept."³⁰ This is a refrain I've made mention of already in this chapter: those who are poor exist in that state because they are too lazy, too unmotivated (most likely as a result of unnecessarily robust governmental welfare programs), or too uneducated to get a job. Thus the hallmark of this era is that individual responsibility and self-reliance must be values developed in the coddled masses of the unemployed. In this way, they have an "obligation" to endeavor to find a job, and be willing to do whatever it takes (including moving, taking menial employment, or going back to school) in order to secure employment.

The corollary to this promotion of the rugged individual is the belief that there are enough jobs out there available to all of these people. Therefore, if the poor were to just do their part, they would no longer be unemployed. But as Mitchell and Muysken go on to argue:

The reality is that no reciprocal obligation is placed on government to provide enough jobs and enough hours of employment for all those seeking work. The major shortcoming is that the focus on the individual ignores the role that macroeconomic constraints play in creating welfare dependence. The preoccupation with instituting behavioral requirements and enforcing sanctions for welfare recipients suggests that governments perceive dependence as an

³⁰ William Mitchell and Joan Muysken, *Full Employment Abandoned* (Northampton, MA: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2008), 261. While this understanding of the causes of a person being unemployed has changed to some degree in the wake of the global crisis and recession, it is still frequently appealed to as the cause of why someone is out of work.

individual preference. However, if jobs are rationed then it is a compositional fallacy to consider that the difference between getting a job and being unemployed is a matter of individual endeavor.³¹

Governmental policies, influenced by neo-liberal economics, have shifted from promoting a climate where full employment (striving to guarantee that everyone actually has work) is the target to one wherein “full employability” reigns. According to this principle, individuals need to equip themselves to get a job on whatever terms the economy is offering employment, and if they work hard enough they will get one. Thus the onus (obligation) is placed solely on the individual worker to make himself “employable”; if he does not succeed in finding work, he has no one to blame but himself. He either lacked the skills required in the job market, or didn’t try hard enough to find employment. Again, the full employability model holds that there are (or can be) enough jobs out there in the market for all those seeking employment; if someone is unemployed, it is his own fault. This explanation is offered up as true not only nationally, but also internationally. Such a mindset feeds into the acceptance of explanatory nationalism as a theory of the causes of global poverty: countries are poor because they refuse to retool their economies for export-led production, or refuse to accept the prescriptions of structural adjustment loans from the IMF.³² If a country (or its people) is poor, it is that country’s fault.

³¹ Ibid., 128.

³² In his book *Globalization and its Discontents*, Joseph Stiglitz details how these loans are offered with conditions that the debtor country must adopt neoliberal economic policies that focus domestic spending and production on producing goods for export, as it is more efficient. Cf. Joseph Stiglitz, *Globalization and its Discontents* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2003).

This assertion is patently false, especially in light of the realities of global poverty and the economic system that causes it. With efficiency as the base, jobs need not end up being created if technology can perform the work for less. As such labor-saving technology is implemented, fewer and fewer jobs are left behind to be doled out amongst an ever-increasing number of unemployed people. There is a total neglect of the possibility that a systemic failure is occurring, one wherein the economic system is oriented in such a way as to not be able to generate enough work to provide employment for all able-bodied people.

It is here that I think the hammer stroke has fallen hardest upon the poor of the world.³³ Global implementation of technology has taken so much of the actual labor out of production that there are fewer and fewer jobs to go around. Even when jobs are available, they involve so little meaningful exertion and are instead mechanical processes, manipulating machines that perform the actual labor. Skilled labor has become lost in the fervor of “deskilling,” where producers want to hire particularly those who *lack* particular trade skills, as they can be paid less and replaced easily. Those industries that still rely on great deals of human labor are often sweatshops, exploiting and dehumanizing workers to such cruel extents that the work can hardly be called labor. Mitchell and Muysken refer to this paring down of meaningful labor as “underutilization” or “underemployment,” a factor that goes unrecognized in the statistical analyses of

³³ Even outside of the poorest of the world (which my statistics offered in the Introduction identify), the recent economic crises have certainly brought to light the fact that such a focus on cutting labor-intensive production has very much affected the lower and middle classes in affluent countries such as the United States. Outsourcing in particular has become the bane of the working class in the West, as producers concerned with efficiency demand a movement of production to areas where labor costs are the lowest at all times.

unemployment. While people may be left with their jobs intact after a given technology is implemented within the workplace, the quality of that job can be quite adversely affected in one of two ways: either the laborer's work is intensified, so they must work longer hours to produce enough to keep their wages the same, or they are subject to "deskilling."³⁴ In other areas, such as in agriculture, the global market and trade policies have made labor-intensive production almost impossible as these farmers cannot compete with the larger machine-driven producers. Again, given the fact that over 70 percent of the world's poorest people are rural agricultural workers, such policies have far-reaching negative effects on the poor.

By focusing on monetary cost efficiency and framing increases in productivity (and technology) in terms of monetary profits, global economic players have erased so many of the opportunities for truly human labor that were involved in producing the goods of our world. Prior to the globalized world of the last forty or so years, the expansion of markets meant that enterprises focused on technical efficiency; as demand for products was going up, producers were focused on making goods fast enough to keep up with rising demand. But in today's globalized marketplace, producers have turned instead to emphasizing monetary cost efficiency. There is a downward pressure to make things more cheaply (and thus oftentimes with less human labor).

Additionally, what little labor is left in the production process has changed character into an alienated, meaningless, and mechanized process, hardly befitting human laborers. Again, societal attitudes on labor have been altered by the implementation of

³⁴ On this point, see Mitchell and Muysken, 169-170. As we have seen in the United States in recent years, many workers who were formerly employed in skilled labor end up turning to the service industry, selling products and services, rather than utilizing their skills to produce objects for consumption.

vast labor-saving technologies, and labor itself has thus fallen out of favor as an integral part of life, existence, and production. Labor in general has been devalued to the point of being seen as a commodity, rather than as an intrinsic aspect of our species-being, and a human need for human beings.³⁵

A Solution?

As will become clearer in the following section, I argue against using the current definition of efficiency as the guiding principle of economic organization. Instead, keeping in mind my goal as meaningful human labor, I will instead defend a different understanding of “efficiency” based in species-being, and focusing on a tempered use of technology to provide “good work.”

It may seem that I am being overly simplistic in my appraisal of efficiency. Let me be clear about my critique: by jettisoning an all-encompassing concern for (monetary cost) efficiency, I am not claiming that producers should simply be willing to accept monetary losses in order to keep people employed, regardless of market fluctuations. Business enterprises need to be productive, and need not be wasteful in terms of resources or materials. And yet my argument contains within it a sense that just because things are a certain way, there is no reason that they could not in fact be otherwise. Trying to make the lives of the worst off among us better, or seeing everyone’s basic rights fulfilled, is a worthy goal, but unless we aim for more than that, we cannot meet even that minimal goal. What we need to aim for is a Marxian human world.

³⁵ This phenomenon of alienation is certainly not new, as Marx saw it as the utmost concern in his day. At the same time, whatever progress that had been made in this area during the early 20th century (again up until the 1950s) is swiftly and surely disappearing, because of the concern for efficiency.

The key practical implication of a Marxian species-being approach to global poverty is that we should focus on providing *all* people with access to meaningful labor. Note however that merely providing menial employment to the involuntarily unemployed will only erase the technical deficits faced, but it does little for their humanity, if the labor is not in some way meaningful. We needn't pay people to dig holes in a field, and then pay other people to come and fill in those holes. As we shall see, a focus on "meaningful labor" may mean striving to employ the unemployed, but it also points to a higher goal, wherein we must change the character of labor itself.

More specifically, we must affect changes in structures so that labor can be viewed in a much more positive light within society. Currently, all that is seen to have value in the productive equation is money, and thus the concern is for overhead costs, labor time, and wages. Instead of this simplistic view, we must change our mindset (and, in turn, our institutions) to realize that labor itself is something of value for human beings (both for its own sake, as well as instrumentally). It is more than just a "factor in production."

Changing the character of work and re-humanizing it not only helps to solve the problem of alienated labor, but also suggests a solution to global poverty. By altering our productive processes to incorporate "good work" again, we can not only allow for a more human production process, but also involve more humans in production. Such an increase in the amount of labor necessary to produce goods that satisfy the needs of the world means that more people (especially those who are currently "poor") are able to be a part of the productive process. This alteration of the structures of labor-saving

technology is admittedly not “value-neutral”; it is influenced by a Marxian view of labor and labor’s value for human life, and thus its logical justification differs from a concern for monetary cost efficiency.

How do we best approach changing the character of labor? To this point, labor-saving technology has been the lynchpin of the capitalist productive equation, and the result of such technology is that it has made vast numbers of human beings worse off. In his historical analysis of capitalism, Immanuel Wallerstein details these disastrous results very clearly:

The overwhelming proportion of the world’s work-forces, who live in rural zones or move between them and urban slums, are worse off than their ancestors five hundred years ago. They eat less well, and certainly have a less balanced diet. Although they are more likely to survive the first year of life (because of the effect of social hygiene undertaken to protect the privileged), I doubt that the life prospects of the majority of the world’s population *as of age one* are greater than previously; I suspect the opposite is true. They unquestionably work harder – more hours per day, per year, per lifetime. And since they do this for less total reward, the rate of exploitation has escalated very sharply.³⁶

Given these terrible results, we must revisit the role that labor-saving technology should have in the productive process. Of course by not adopting some possible labor-saving technology businesses will be decried as “inefficient” in terms of the logic of the *current* economic system. But if we are able to change the context and logic of our system so as to generate a truly human world, the concept of efficiency in production changes as well. If “efficiency” is to mean achieving some end of production with a minimal waste of valuable resources, then a level of technology that renders masses of human beings unemployed is *prima facie* inefficient; we are wasting the valuable resource of fully human beings who are capable of productive, meaningful labor. And if

³⁶ Immanuel Wallerstein, *Historical Capitalism with Capitalist Civilization* (New York: Verso, 2003), 101.

the end we seek is a fully human world populated by fully human beings developed in terms of species-being, then it becomes clear that labor-saving technology isn't always "efficient." It *does not* ensure we produce our end, nor does it keep us from wasting some precious resource in the process. Our current level of labor-saving technology is actually inefficient, not in the sense that we are wasting material goods, but insofar as we are wasting human beings.³⁷

Thus we need to rearrange the place of labor in production so as to make it actually "efficient" in human terms. To do so, we will end up seeking out technology that will create meaningful labor, and decrease involuntary unemployment. If we are able to create an environment where all have access to productive meaningful labor, we will undercut the very foundations of poverty, and allow for all people to develop themselves as fully human. Developing species-being in the interests of bringing about a fully human world has much to offer *everyone*, not just the poor.

In order to address the problem of global poverty in the most efficacious way (that being a way that moves us in the direction of a truly human world), our technologies, economic structures, and governmental policies should be systematically oriented, not towards consumption or more labor-saving technology, but rather towards providing meaningful labor for all. In and of itself, this goal might not take us beyond capitalism, but it no doubt points to a different type of world in terms of labor.

³⁷ This is something that I think Pogge overlooks in his appraisal of the causes of poverty. He sees efficiency (perhaps only implicitly, as he never mentions it) as a morally valid aspect of the global order that need not change, whereas I argue that even with the type of changes Pogge endorses, poverty couldn't be solved unless the roles of labor-saving technology and efficiency are revisited and revised.

E.F. Schumacher and “Intermediate Technology”

To move towards a new and more appropriate approach to global poverty (one in line with our nature as species-being and the concerns above), we must re-examine and re-humanize our conception of the place of labor in human life and society. Labor is of central importance to our species-being; good work is a fundamental human need. At the same time, our current economic system is organized in such a way as to minimize the role of actual human labor involved in production. It is this trend that must be restructured for the sake of the world’s poor – and for the rest of us as well. Only when labor is appropriately valued and promoted (through appropriate levels of technology) will the poor be able to not only overcome their squalor, but also begin to truly develop themselves in accordance with their species-being.

In order to provide a technical framework for the ethical position that I have developed above, I appeal to the two seminal works of E.F. Schumacher: *Small is Beautiful* and *Good Work*, both written in the early 1970s. Today, some forty years later, Schumacher’s work has seen significant resurgence among many groups: Economists, philosophers, and activists alike view his work as particularly relevant to anti-poverty initiatives today. (While Schumacher is technically an economist, he takes an overtly philosophical approach to economic problems in areas of poverty, the environment, and politics.)

E.F. Schumacher was born in Bonn, Germany in 1911. The son of academic parents, he spent years being educated in Germany, Oxford, and New York, before returning to Germany in 1934, during the rise of the Nazis. Increasingly anxious about

the party's agenda and actions, he and his family left for England. There, as a result of increasing anti-German sentiment, he was relegated to the country to work as a farm laborer, even being interred in a detention camp for a few months. These experiences greatly influenced his intellectual development and his sense of the importance of labor.

During his time on the farm, he began to write widely on economic issues, which brought him to the attention of John Maynard Keynes. Keynes lobbied the British government to release Schumacher from his labor, and involved him in economic discussions regarding British economic policy, and later German postwar reconstruction. As a result of his experiences on the farm during the war, Schumacher began to utilize a sense of “appropriateness” in reference to technology and industry (a point which will be extremely important to my argument going forward).

In the 1950s, Schumacher became increasingly influenced by Gandhi and by Buddhist thought, spending time as an economic consultant (through the United Nations) in Burma and then in India. As a result he not only was moved by the Buddhist rejection of materialism, but also by the abject poverty that he experienced. He came to believe that the root cause of such rampant misery was the impact of Western levels of technology and industry on smaller, traditionally self-sufficient cultures. Late in his life, influenced by reading Aquinas and seeing a convergence between his idea of the importance of labor to human beings and the socioeconomic teachings of the Catholic Church (specifically Pope John XXIII's encyclical on “Christianity and Social Progress” in 1961), Schumacher converted to Catholicism.

Schumacher's work fits in perfectly with the ethical approach I have developed, and provides a solid backing for my Marxian claim about the nature of work and its centrality to a fully human existence, and for my assertion concerning the need to develop an alternative view of economic activity that has at its core the value of meaningful labor, rather than consumption. Drawing upon Buddhist and Christian worldviews, Schumacher echoes Marx's claim about the central importance of labor for human beings. He takes the function of work to be threefold: "To give a man a chance to utilize and develop his faculties; to enable him to overcome his ego-centeredness by joining with other people in a common task; and to bring forth the goods and services needed for a becoming existence."³⁸ While work is no doubt necessary for our continued survival (thus meeting our natural needs, as Marx has it), meaningful work for individuals involves satisfying a human need to develop ourselves and create relationships with other human beings.

Schumacher, like Marx, connects work to a conception of human nature that highlights human potential: "How does work relate to the end and purpose of man's being? It has been recognized...that every human being born into this world has to work not merely to keep himself alive but to strive towards perfection."³⁹ While he does not explicitly utilize Marx's argument, there is a clear link present between Marx and Schumacher. In order to develop ourselves into fully human beings, people must be able to labor in some way that develops their creative faculties.

³⁸ E.F. Schumacher, *Small Is Beautiful* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1973), 58.

³⁹ E.F. Schumacher, *Good Work* (New York: Harper and Row, 1979), 3.

But, as Schumacher indicates, our current economic climate views labor in an altogether different way:

A fundamental source of wealth is human labor. Now, the modern economist has been brought up to consider 'labor' or work as little more than a necessary evil. From the point of view of the employer, it is in any case simply an item of cost, to be reduced to a minimum if it cannot be eliminated altogether, say, by automation. From the point of view of the workman, it is a 'disutility'; to work is to make a sacrifice of one's leisure and comfort, and wages are a kind of compensation for the sacrifice. Hence the ideal from the point of view of the employer is to have output without employees, and the ideal from the point of view of the employee is to have income without employment.⁴⁰

Everyone (the employer/capitalist and the worker alike) tends to view labor as only a means to end (profit or consumption), and thus it is at best tolerated. Labor is not considered a human need; society does not view it as something that is intrinsically necessary for human beings. We work begrudgingly, and try to avoid it whenever possible. According to Schumacher, this can clearly be seen in the fact that modern economists measure a given group's 'standard of living' in terms of consumption and buying power.⁴¹

Thus labor's place within society and an individual human life has been altered to be as follows: it is to be minimized at every turn. In fact, this approach to labor is worn proudly on the sleeve of our economic system: "The basic aim of modern industrialism is not to make work satisfying but to raise productivity; its proudest achievement is labor saving, whereby labor is stamped with the mark of undesirability."⁴² As I argued above,

⁴⁰ *Small is Beautiful*, 57.

⁴¹ Cf. *Ibid.*, 61.

⁴² *Good Work*, 27.

cost efficiency sets a standard whereby production should involve the lowest possible cost expenditure, and, since labor is a cost, the least amount of human labor possible.

“Modern” Technology

To aid us in this escape from work, technology has become our “savior” insofar as it allows us to minimize the amount of labor necessary to produce what meets our natural needs. Here Schumacher’s position diverges from Marx. Marx did not necessarily critique labor-saving technology as undermining human nature; in fact, he saw it as a good thing. The utilization of labor-saving technology could mean, in principle, that it would require less labor time on the part of an individual to produce objects to meet his needs, and thus he could spend the remaining time engaged in leisure.⁴³ The problem, according to Marx, was that capitalism had not spread the leisure time around to all people (the worker in particular).

Schumacher’s view of labor-saving technology, however, is quite different from Marx’s. According to Schumacher, labor has become perhaps a tolerated natural need, rather than a truly human need; we can escape labor in proportion to the level of technology that we can employ. It is the promulgation of this minimizing view of labor that Schumacher sees as one of the biggest factors in the rampant utilization of labor-saving technology. It’s important to note that he does not damn technology in and of itself; rather, the problem is with the unquestioning, one-directional implementation of

⁴³ Within our current society, there are generally two conception of leisure: one involves simply not laboring, while the other involves laboring meaningfully and engaging in recreation to energize future labor (both aspects of which are presupposed to be social activities). Both Marx and Schumacher are focused on trying to provide the latter for the laborer, but while Marx saw communism as the only way to provide either kind of leisure to the laborer, Schumacher argues (and I agree) that we must change the character of labor and reevaluate the place of labor-saving technology in order to provide any possibility of obtaining either conception of leisure.

technology, at all costs. The societal mantra has become: “Whatever becomes technologically possible – within certain economic limits – must be done. Society must adapt itself to it. The question whether or not it does any good is ruled out.”⁴⁴ In the productive process, the desire to minimize labor has developed with such zeal that no one pauses to consider the possibility that some technological development may make people worse off, rather than better; even posing such a question brands one as against the “progress” of society.

In this way, Schumacher remarks that “technology recognizes no self-limiting principle – in terms, for instance, of size, speed, or violence. It therefore does not possess the virtues of being self-balancing, self-adjusting, and self-cleansing.”⁴⁵ It is this lack of a limiting principle that I argue best embodies the role of technology within the “efficiency quest” of modern capitalist production. Instead of critically examining the effects of a given technological innovation on the laborers it will affect, such technology is unquestioningly embraced and implemented. If something is technologically possible (provided that it lowers costs), it should be done; the possibility that such technology may not actually make human lives better (or that it could make them worse!) does not enter into the picture. As such, more “advanced” technology is always better, and there is never any question that new technologies which make production cheaper are a good thing.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Ibid., 30-31.

⁴⁵ *Small is Beautiful*, 156.

⁴⁶ Here is a clear link here with Feenberg’s point that technology is not value-neutral. Within our current system, faster and less labor-intensive production is valuable, and thus such value is reflected in our appraisal and adoption of technology. What I am questioning here, using Schumacher, is whether or not

The counterargument, as I've mentioned, is that implementing new technology in the productive process makes for less necessary human labor time, which in turn begets more leisure time for workers. If a new machine can produce ten shirts per hour (under the eye of a human controller), this is better, according to the efficiency minimalist, than having the same worker labor to make three shirts in the same amount of time. Labor-saving technology will necessarily increase leisure time and thus technological developments that actually hurt workers (long-term) are unimaginable; labor is "saved" from being wasted.

But, as Schumacher points out, leisure time appears *not* to have entered into the picture as presupposed: "Paradoxical as it may seem, modern industrial society, in spite of an incredible proliferation of labor-saving devices, has not given people more time to devote to their all-important spiritual tasks."⁴⁷ Given the concern for efficiency, there is no real incentive to provide increased leisure time for workers. If technology can be implemented to increase profits, it does not matter whether or not this actually increases the leisure time of the laborers who are affected. Instead of producing leisure, this unbridled implementation of labor-saving technology has only led to a growth in the scale of productive endeavors. A new wrinkle has emerged, wherein the picture of scale has been grossly distorted, insofar as bigger is now necessarily better. Again, this indicates the level to which efficiency has become the guiding economic principle; the reason such mass production is employed is because of the efficiency of economies of

such technology (and the values it represents) is actually appropriate given its detrimental effects on our development and species-being.

⁴⁷ *Good Work*, 25.

scale. The more technology one implements, the more goods are produced faster and more cheaply, leading to greater profit margins.⁴⁸ There is a double dimension at work here: in order to remain competitive, either a business must lay off workers (and thus do the same amount of work with less laborers), or it must grow the output of its enterprise (by getting more out of the same amount of workers). Either way, in doing so, the enterprise can and does replace workers with labor-saving technology.

In addition, the scale of technology itself has grown; the labor-saving technologies that are widely implemented require a great deal of up-front capital to implement, and this means that many times only large producers are able to muster the capital required. As Schumacher argues, “Modern technology, generally speaking, makes good shoes only for big fellows. It is geared to mass production; it is highly sophisticated and enormously capital-costly.”⁴⁹ Thus modern industry with its technological zeal has trended towards ever-increasing size and complexity, along with being more and more capital intensive. To have any chance to survive as a producer in the global economy, advanced labor-saving technology must be the core of a productive business, and such technology involves a great deal of up-front capital. From the efficiency standpoint, this is acceptable as it ends up keeping production costs low. But from the standpoint of small producers in developing countries, they have no means to obtain the capital necessary to implement this level of labor-saving technology. As such,

⁴⁸ Schumacher also argues that to keep up with such increased production, the perceived needs of consumers must be cultivated on the same level. “Industry declares that advertising is absolutely necessary to create a mass market, to permit efficient mass production. But what is the great bulk of advertising other than the stimulation of greed, envy, and avarice?” See here *Ibid.*, 26.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 49.

they are quickly squeezed out of the possibility of sustainable living through their own labor.

The ever-increasing utilization of labor-saving technology in production feeds industrial growth measurable by G.N.P., which our efficiency-craving and labor-minimizing economist always sees as a good thing. But this positive view holds, “irrespective of what has grown and who, if anyone, has benefitted. The idea that there could be pathological growth, unhealthy growth, disruptive or destructive growth, is...a perverse idea.”⁵⁰ In fact, Schumacher’s main claim is that the growth that has occurred at the feet of technology *is* unhealthy, disruptive, and destructive. What it has destroyed is the importance of labor for human beings.⁵¹

This destruction of labor as an important facet of human beings has horrific practical implications. According to a short talk Schumacher gave the day before he died entitled “On Technology for a Democratic Society,” labor-saving technology has come to constitute “a force that forms society, and forms it so that fewer and fewer people can be *real people* [emphasis added].”⁵² One of the ways in which such technology robs human beings of “real” lives is involuntary unemployment on a very large scale; much of the world’s poor are unable to find any avenue to labor, since machines perform more and more of the unskilled labor tasks. In addition, what labor has remained after the

⁵⁰ *Small is Beautiful*, 51.

⁵¹ Schumacher goes even further in his indictment of modern economics and its worship of efficiency, referring to economics as “metaphysically blind.” They are so obsessed with monetary efficiency that they see this as having more value than the humanity of laborers, and the way in which meaningful labor benefits the human person. On this point, see *Ibid.*, 57.

⁵² E.F. Schumacher, “On Technology for a Democratic Society,” in *Small Is Possible*, Ed. George McRobie (New York: Harper and Row, 1981), 4.

technology boom in industry has been altered to the level of meaningless, degrading activity, hardly worthy of being called “work.” We have minimized the amount of creativity and actual labor put into the productive process. This means that raw materials go into the factory and come out improved, while human beings go into the factory as people and come out “corrupted and degraded.”⁵³ Lastly, even if poor individuals are able to find some way to labor (such as poor subsistence farmers), they run up against the issue of scale, as they are unable to compete in the market, and thus cannot make a living for themselves.

Underlying all of these causes of poverty is a sense that we have lost what labor means for human beings; it has instead come to be devalued and discarded. Thus it is that Schumacher offers perhaps his most damning statement on modern industrial society:

How could we explain the almost universal refusal on the part of the rulers of the rich societies...to work towards *the humanization of work*? It is only necessary to assert that something would reduce the ‘standard of living’ and every debate is instantly closed. That soul-destroying, meaningless, monotonous, moronic work is an insult to human nature which must necessarily and inevitably produce either escapism or aggression, and that no amount of ‘bread and circuses’ can compensate for the damage done.⁵⁴

He argues that we are at a point of crisis in terms of labor.⁵⁵ A majority of the world’s population is either unable to find work, or the work they end up with is utterly dehumanizing. Still others toil ceaselessly, only to be unable to overcome the

⁵³ *Small is Beautiful*, 160.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 38-39.

⁵⁵ It is rather interesting, albeit disheartening, that he is talking about society being in crisis in the early 1970s, given the state of world economic affairs almost forty years later.

discrepancies in scale of the economic playing field. Yet any attempt to question the role that technology has played in this devastation, or the implication that perhaps we should “take a technological step back” to move forward, is met with skepticism and scorn; to do so would be inefficient.

Something doesn’t fit; a once-round peg has become square and been crammed into a round hole, while the hole is merely being whittled away to try to make the fit palatable. Schumacher offers two possibilities: either our technology is “brilliant” yet our economic system is otherwise poorly constructed, or the technology itself does not fit the realities of the present day, *including our human nature*.⁵⁶ Using the metaphor of a moving train, he phrases the issue this way:

In short: [perhaps] we have a splendid train but a bad track or a rotten driver or a lot of stupid, unruly passengers. Maybe all this is quite true, except that we do not have such a splendid train at all. Maybe what is most wrong is that which has been and continues to be the strongest formative force – the technology itself.⁵⁷

There is something problematic with the level of technology that we currently employ in production, insofar as it tends to generate both unemployment and work which is dehumanizing and meaningless, and thus is ill-suited for our human nature as species-being.

Intermediate, Appropriate (and thus Human) Technology

Instead of a level of technology that de-humanizes workers, the short and simple answer is to develop and implement technology on a level that *does* fit with the nature of human beings. From the standpoint of the poor of the world, mass factory production

⁵⁶ *Good Work*, 39 (emphasis is mine).

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 40.

and large-scale farms are wholly inappropriate; they directly create high levels of unemployment, and encourage those unemployed workers to migrate to urban centers, where the few outlets for labor involve only drudgery. Schumacher claims that “Western technology has been devised primarily for the purpose of saving labor; it could hardly be appropriate for districts or regions troubled with a large labor surplus.”⁵⁸ As producers have attempted to “modernize” through the adoption of new labor-saving technology, all they have actually succeeded in doing is extinguishing old labor opportunities faster than they have created new ones. This creates a new group of unemployed workers who, seeing that there are now less opportunities for labor, inevitably migrate to metropolitan slums looking for work.⁵⁹

In order to put these unemployed people back to work in meaningful ways, Schumacher argues that we must find a level of technology that is somewhere in between the archaic and the overzealous; it must be “appropriate,” and thus is “intermediate.” Such “intermediate technology” will no doubt involve more labor than the current productive process does, but that’s exactly the point: there will be *more* labor involved, and the quality of such labor will be more in line with our humanity. As a result more people will be able to labor, an outcome that benefits both the individuals and society as a whole.

To begin with, Schumacher turns the current adages of development (in terms of scale, complexity, and capital-intensiveness) on their heads: “Let’s begin with basic human requirements...and there I can’t see anything that man really *needs* that cannot be

⁵⁸ E.F. Schumacher, “How to Help Them Help Themselves,” in *Small Is Possible*, 28.

⁵⁹ Cf. *Ibid.*, 25-26.

produced very simply, very efficiently, very viably on a small scale with a radically simplified technology, with very little initial capital, so that even little people can get at it.”⁶⁰ While complex items such as jet engines may require equally complex technology, the production of basic foodstuffs can be done on a small scale with varying degrees of technology, including many low-level technological processes. To allow for the poor to have a chance at development, Schumacher claims that they must be able to have access to an appropriate and feasible level of production. This approach is not a Luddite attitude, whereby any new technology is inherently bad and must be thrown out at all costs; technology is not always the sole problematic factor.

The history of productive enterprise and technology has much to offer by way of ideas. To develop intermediate technology, we must seek out “methods and equipment that are (1) cheap enough so that they are accessible to virtually everyone, (2) suitable for small-scale applications, and (3) compatible with man’s need for creativity.”⁶¹ In this way, intermediate technology offers a way for everyone, the poor of the world in particular, to labor meaningfully. As I’ve argued in the preceding pages, our human nature is such that for people to be fully human, they must labor and feel that they are in some way productive beings, engaging in stimulating, “sensuous” activity that is worthy of human time and effort. By altering the scale of production to be much smaller and to make the process itself more labor-intensive, we are making such labor much more available to individual people all over the world, especially those in impoverished areas.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 21. It’s worth noting that here he does use the term “efficiently” to describe such production. By this he means that such production will not be unnecessarily wasteful in terms of materials or time, *not* that it will be willing to sacrifice meaningful labor for cheaper production costs.

⁶¹ *Small is Beautiful*, 35.

Furthermore, by utilizing small-scale applications and technology that do not usurp human creativity, the quality of such labor is much more in line with what I've been calling meaningful labor. The level of technology that is implemented is governed by a sense of what is appropriate in light of its effects on the quality of labor, as opposed to its effects on how quickly or cheaply a commodity can be produced. Production that involves more labor than is perhaps technically necessary will in fact be seen as appropriate, even if it isn't "economically efficient." Since meaningful labor is something of value for human beings, it is appropriate to promote it, rather than forcing poor people to try to survive without it.

Thus I argue, with Schumacher, that a sense of appropriateness must replace the current worship of cost efficiency in production. The appropriateness of any possible intermediate technology depends upon the scale of a given project and the environment in which production is to take place (both in terms of the natural environment, as well as the culture). This shift in the focus of productive enterprises has at its base a concern for the humanity of the laborers, and the ways in which technology will actually improve (or destroy) such humanity. As Schumacher states:

[Individuals] first need is to start work of some kind that brings some reward, however small; it is only when they experience that their time and labor is of value that they can become interested in making it more valuable. It is therefore more important that everybody should produce something than that a few people should each produce a great deal.⁶²

Given an opportunity to engage in labor that has value and involves creativity and attention to detail, poor people will be able to experience themselves and their abilities as fully human, and in turn create both new needs and new opportunities for themselves and

⁶² Ibid., 184.

others to labor. Intermediate technology can make work more interesting and imaginative, which introduces a “re-skilling,” rather than deskilling, of labor. Again, this gives more people the chance to labor in some aspect of production, rather than a smaller number of people the chance to control machines that produce “efficiently.”

So how can this change take place? How can we develop and implement intermediate technology? It’s important to note that for Schumacher intermediate technology is not a “thing” in and of itself; rather it is a guiding vision that can be brought to bear on individual situations. On this view the concept of appropriateness functions as a directing principle which can be applied in individual circumstances. Overall, what will be appropriate to allow for meaningful human labor in production is not large labor-saving technological production, nor simple primitive production. Instead, intermediate technology is superior to the latter but much simpler, cheaper, and less capital intensive than the former. Within the context of agriculture, for example, we aim for something between the archaic, impractical hoe and the expensive, labor-reducing tractor.

Schumacher claims that seeking out intermediate technology can happen in three distinct ways: upgrading low-level technology to a level that isn’t wholly inefficient but still involves a significant amount of human labor, downgrading machine processes that are in place solely to save labor (especially pertinent for poor countries), or developing new scientific technologies from scratch (which can be difficult for individuals in poor countries who lack technical education and time to spend on “innovation”).⁶³ The first two options are the ones he sees as the most viable within the context of developing

⁶³ *Good Work*, 128.

countries. By adjusting technology upwards or downwards as circumstances demand, we can provide more meaningful labor for people, while at the same time producing commodities that can be sold in the marketplace.

What makes this approach so controversial and pertinent today is the possibility of downscaling technology in many productive arenas. As I have made clear to this point, labor-saving technology is seen as inherently beneficial for production, and thus it is unquestioningly incorporated and developed if it is possible to do so; rarely, if ever, do producers ask if more technology in production will make their workers better off. Yet Schumacher leaves no doubt that in many cases goods can be produced with much less-sophisticated technology, and with less capital involved (thereby making it accessible to the poor of the world). He points out the example of the process of bending steel as an area where intermediate technology can be applied. Years before the giant machines used in Pittsburgh steel mills were invented, steel was bent by hand around the world. While the machinery makes the process faster and (obviously) much less labor-intensive, it can no doubt be done with smaller and more individualized tools and technology (and relatively cheaply) within the developing countries themselves.⁶⁴

In response, the “efficient economist” may respond that this is clearly a Luddite move; why try to produce this locally by hand when it can be bent in Pittsburgh and then cheaply exported to anywhere in the world? The answer, as we’ve seen, is that such an approach is not *appropriate*. It may provide cost efficiency, but it offers nothing in terms of meaningful labor for local workers; in fact, it completely eradicates the potential for such labor in the local arena.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 135-136.

Another key point here is that bending the steel by hand minimizes the infrastructure and capital requirements for starting up such an enterprise locally. The vast implementation of labor-saving, capital-intensive technology in production, according to Schumacher, stands as a huge roadblock to the poor starting up such businesses. They have virtually no access to the capital and liquidity which is required up front. Even if they are able, they must spend most (if not all) of their money on such correlative aspects of production, rather than on production itself. By altering the role of technology in production, such issues of access are quickly allayed.

Schumacher provides another example: the “walking mini-tractor” (called the “Snail”). This instrument is not feasible for plowing large amounts of acreage, but in developing countries it is perfect, as farms have been traditionally a few acres in size. In addition, the fuel and capital costs are 1/100 of a tractor, and thus the Snail is easy to adopt by those in developing countries. It does not usurp human labor, as it must be controlled and commanded, but it still allows a farmer to increase his productivity.⁶⁵

In order for his approach to be effective in attacking conditions of poverty as they are generated through mass unemployment and mass migration, Schumacher proposes four criteria for what he called an “agro-industrial culture,” focused on agricultural labor and an appropriate level of technological utilization:

1. Workplaces have to be created in the areas where the people are living now, and not primarily in metropolitan areas into which they tend to migrate;
2. These workplaces must be, on average, cheap enough so that they can be created in large numbers without this calling for an unattainable level of savings and imports;

⁶⁵ Ibid., 88-90.

3. The production methods employed must be relatively simple, so that the demands for high skills are minimized, not only in the productions process itself but also in matters of organization, raw material supply, financing, marketing, and so forth;
4. Production should be largely from local materials for local use.⁶⁶

With the implementation of intermediate, appropriate technology, we increase the amount of labor in production. In turn, since this technology has been incorporated (or re-incorporated) because it requires direct and creative human labor, it provides the workers with an opportunity to fulfill their human need for meaningful labor, or “Good Work,” as Schumacher has it. Making a greater amount of labor necessary for production means more labor available for more people (certainly at least a step in the right direction of full employment). This is a return to a more appropriate paradigm of production, rather than merely a regression to primitive productive methods. In developing countries around the world, more labor-intensive production means the poor who were driven into massively overcrowded urban areas are able to return to the land from whence they came. Couple this “Good Work” with making such small-scale agricultural viable (and perhaps an emphasis on local production, rather than ever-increasing trade), and we have reduced the need for exploitative drudgery in sweatshops, which in turn increases the availability of good work for more of the world’s poor. Schumacher invokes Gandhi in seeing this as giving us a sense of “production by the masses,” rather than “mass production.”⁶⁷

Notice here that applying Schumacher’s approach would do more than simply eradicate unemployment by giving everyone a job; it would provide meaningful *human*

⁶⁶ “How To Help Them Help Themselves,” *Small Is Possible*, 27.

⁶⁷ *Small is Beautiful*, 163.

work for the poor, whether they are poor subsistence farmers in a developing country, or those begging on the streets of Chicago because they are unemployed. They will now have the opportunity to not only rise out of their conditions of physical poverty, but also the “human poverty” of which Marx speaks.

Notice also that the “aid” provided to the poor comes not in the form of philanthropy or donations, but rather in a form that provides what David Ellerman calls “autonomy-respecting assistance.” In his book *Helping People Help Themselves*, Ellerman (an economist, philosopher, and former economic advisor to Joseph Stiglitz during the latter’s tenure as chief economist of the World Bank) argues that most kind of aid/help that is offered to developing countries ends up undercutting their ability to effectively move forward. Citing Schumacher approvingly, he points out that an approach of Intermediate Technology provides aid and direction to the poor “in such a way that respects, fosters, and sustains the autonomy of the doers [the poor]...When the doers have the will, there is a way; the best role for the helpers is to indirectly enable and expedite that way, not try to substitute their will for that of the doers.”⁶⁸ This is precisely Schumacher’s point: that, given an appropriate level of technology, poor people can again produce in ways that allow them to make a living, while at the same time allowing them to utilize technology so as to keep themselves actively in the productive process (rather than removing themselves from it). Intermediate Technology works along the lines of Ellerman’s concern for an indirect approach, where the objective is “not to supply

⁶⁸ David Ellerman, *Helping People Help Themselves* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2006), 7.

motivation to the doers but to find and start with the existing own motivation of the doers and to supply help on that basis.”⁶⁹

Schumacher’s approach promotes the possibility for all individuals to engage in meaningful labor by altering the level of labor-saving technology in production. In this way, technology is appropriate for creating “real” human beings. As Schumacher argues, “I have no doubt that it is possible to give a new direction to technological development, a direction that shall lead it back to the real needs of man, and that also means: *to the actual size of man*. Man is small, and, therefore, small is beautiful. To go for giantism is to go for self-destruction.”⁷⁰ This statement signifies an approach which is overtly focusing in on human needs that must be developed in accordance with species-being, rather than seeing production and labor as merely meeting our natural needs of survival.

I argue then that a conception of a fully human world has at its core the kind of good work that Schumacher’s view offers. As meaningful labor is a human need, developing Intermediate Technology is a practical way in which meaningful labor can be developed for those who do not currently have access to it.⁷¹ Again, this approach moves clearly in the direction of a world without poverty by attacking one of the root causes of such poverty. At the same time, the growth of opportunities for meaningful labor pushes

⁶⁹ Ibid., 11.

⁷⁰ Schumacher, *Small is Beautiful*, 169.

⁷¹ This development of meaningful labor for all people happens with sensitivity to Ellerman’s concerns that any aid to the poor in developing countries must happen in such a way that it does not undermine their autonomy as doers. As Ellerman notes, “The doers will acquire development only as the fruits of their own labor.” (Ibid., 252). By adopting Schumacher’s vision of Intermediate Technology, we are changing our world into a place where every individual will have the ability to labor, and thus enjoy its fruits, both in the form of the commodities he produces, as well as the satisfaction of laboring in accordance with his nature as species-being.

our world to not only eradicate poverty, but also allow all individuals to develop themselves in terms of species-being and becoming fully human.

As I find Schumacher's approach as elegant as that of Marx, I will let him have the final word here:

If we can recover the sense that it is the most natural thing for every person born into this world to use his hands in a productive way and that it is not beyond the wit of man to make this possible, then I think the problem of unemployment will disappear and we shall soon be asking ourselves how we can get all the work done that needs to be done.⁷²

⁷² Schumacher, *Small is Beautiful*, 233-234.

CONCLUSION

Let me conclude by examining three specific objections to my argument, ones which resemble those I have leveled against the approaches of Singer, Pogge, and Held, and by offering some suggestions for practical action.

Counter-Arguments

“What If I Do Not Care?”

Given that my project is an attempt to provide a compelling moral motivation, the first objection comes from a person who tries to resist the force of my argument by claiming that he feels no human impulse to help poor people that he encounters. Simply put, this interlocutor asks: “What if I do not care about the beggar who approaches me?”

Looking back over the other approaches to poverty that I have considered, our stubborn interlocutor has tried to deny the motivational argument in each case: To Singer, he claims that he should not have to give money to the poor just because he has the means. To Pogge, he resists the argument that he, personally, is any way causally implicated in the exacerbation of poverty around the world. To Held, he denies that he is connected to the global poor, and thus he has no responsibility to do anything to aid them.

Thus in the face of my argument, he asserts that he feels no human impulse when presented with the neediness of other human beings that he passes by on the street. It would seem then that my argument can be seriously undercut at this early stage. And yet, when asked as to why he gave nothing to the person he passed by, the interlocutor readily

provides the kind of responses that I argue are clear examples of self-deception: “She would just buy drugs,” “I work hard for my money, and I do not want to give it to lazy people who refuse to get a job,” and so on.

Taking these retorts into account, I argue that it is clear that this person *does* have a human impulse to help, but that he is actively working to deceive himself. We all recognize that unmet human needs are inappropriate within our world, and we wish that this state of affairs was not the case; this recognition creates in us a distinctive human response. Even if our interlocutor does not want to admit the existence of such impulses, the evidence for them lies in the types of responses he provides when explaining his passing by a poor person. He is already trying to convince me (and himself) that his inaction was justified for some external reasons. As I argued in Chapter Four, these explanations that he readily conjures up are examples of self-deception; he tries to get himself to believe that those excuses are true, and thus he is “off the hook,” so to speak. The existence of self-deception betrays the existence of a human impulse to help others in need. Our interlocutor *does* have a human impulse to help, and he is covering it up via self-deception.

“Why Resist Self-Deception?”

But even if he may admit that he has such an impulse, there is a second objection that our interlocutor could raise: why should he resist the temptation to self-deception? Why not just go on covering up the impulse to help?

The reason that we must resist self-deception and provide aid to those in need, as I discussed before, is that self-deception harms *us*, as well as the poor. We are forced to stifle our human impulses, and this is a very real phenomenological harm to ourselves. So when he walks by a poor person and resorts to self-deception, our interlocutor is doing something that is directly harming himself, as he hardens his heart to other human beings and their neediness. He is acting contrary to his human nature – his full human potential. At the very least, even if he does not directly act on this impulse and provide aid, he must be reflective about his humanity and the humanity of those people whom he passes by, whether they are beggars on the street, or poor people around the world that he metaphorically “passes by” when he refuses to donate to aid agencies.

The interlocutor may not agree that such harms are evident, or that they are as severe as I argue. As a result, he may refuse to acknowledge that he must avoid self-deception for his own sake (let alone for the sake of those persons in need). In one sense, I cannot force him to accept my conclusion; it is his choice to continue hardening himself and sequestering his human impulses. In the interim, he will continue to be harmed. Yet this does not mean that I must remain silent; I can repeatedly try to convince him of the existence of self-deception in his life, and how it continually harms him. Merely because our interlocutor does not readily accept my conclusions does not mean that he is not open to the cajoling and criticisms of others like me who try to help him to understand and heed his human impulses.

John Stuart Mill makes this point clear in “On Liberty,” when he argues that a robust freedom of speech in society means not only that one has the freedom to hold

whatever opinion one chooses, but also that one must endure the opinions of others who may disagree. As Mill puts it, “We have a right, also, in various ways, to act upon our unfavorable opinion of any one, not to the oppression of his individuality, but in the exercise of ours.”¹

The world will not change so as to make self-deception less necessary for all of us, including our interlocutor (thus pushing us in the direction of a fully human world), unless people recognize the harms it begets, and begin to heed their human impulses to help others.

“What (and How Much) Do I Have To Do?”

Perhaps I succeed in convincing our interlocutor of the harms of self-deception, and he agrees that he must work to change our world into a more fully human one. This brings up a critical concern, one that has been a stumbling block for the approaches to poverty that I considered in earlier chapters: the question of “How much do I have to do?” The inability to answer this question satisfactorily is a critique that I leveled strongly against Singer, Pogge, and Held. Whereas Singer’s argument demands that we give of ourselves to an almost impossible level, Pogge and Held leave open the question of exactly what one must do in order to meet one’s moral obligations or responsibilities, and because of this, their respective arguments are weakened. Even if I accept some causal implication in the promulgation of global poverty, it is thoroughly unclear as to how far I have to go in order to provide recompense, or to stop being a beneficiary, or to live up to my responsibility to help.

¹ John Stuart Mill, “On Liberty,” in *On Liberty and Other Essays*, Ed. John Gray (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 86.

In response to my own argument, this concern can be phrased a bit more specifically: “How do I, as one individual, go about changing the world, making it more fully human? This is surely an impossible task for one individual.”

There is no doubt that the problems of global poverty are large, and that no single contribution in and of itself can “fix” the problem. That being said, the only way to develop a more fully human world at a practical level is through individual action. Keeping in mind the realities of global poverty (by these I mean things like distance and scale), individuals need to become involved in organizations and social movements that are working to eradicate global poverty along human terms. Working together with other individuals through such social action, change can be feasibly achieved. I agree with philosopher Iris Marion Young, who argues that our social connections are a key element in changing global institutions:

Our forward-looking responsibility consists in changing the institutions and processes so that their outcomes will be less unjust. No one of us can do this on our own. Even if it were possible to do so, a single shopper would not change the working conditions of those toiling in sweatshops by refusing to buy all items she had reason to believe were produced under unjust conditions. The structural processes can be altered only if many actors in diverse social positions work together to intervene in these processes to produce different outcomes.²

Thus my answer to the question of “How much do I have to do?” is to argue that you should heed your human impulses. Notice, however, that my answer to this concern may not satisfy our interlocutor. He still may be left with a critical concern: “But you have only given *possible* suggestions as to what one *might* do. You have not detailed precisely what one *must* do. What ‘counts’ as heeding one’s human impulses?”

² Iris Marion Young, “Responsibility and Global Justice,” *Social Philosophy and Policy* 23 (2006): 123.

My response to this objection is straightforward: “It depends.” I admit that there is a certain level of subjectivity in my answer, and in this part of my argument in general; and yet, I claim that this is not a weakness of my position. For the other approaches to global poverty that I have examined, this subjectivity is problematic: if we are *causing* poverty or are *responsible* for the poor, we must be able to say precisely what we must do in order to stop causing it, or how much we must do in order to pay sufficient reparations.

But in the case of my argument, not detailing exactly what one must do is a *strength*, rather than a weakness. Our human impulses are generated in response to the different situations in which we find ourselves. The diversity of such circumstances, coupled with the diversity of human needs, means that what we must do to heed our impulses will also vary. In short, I cannot know what will satisfy a person’s human impulse to help another person, because it depends greatly on the subjective factors I mention. Only you can say how much action you must undertake in order to feel that you are helping the other person and heeding your impulse. Simply saying “I do not feel that I have to do anything” is not a sufficient response, as it does nothing to stop the harm being inflicted upon you by the neediness of the other person (and certainly does nothing to stop the harm her poverty is inflicting upon her). The only way to stem the tide of these harms and begin to correct their causes is to take individual action.

You don’t have a duty to do so; you need to do so, for your own sake. Only by acknowledging the pleas of those in need and actively responding can you avoid hardening your heart, making yourself less human. Given how interconnected our world has become (and is still becoming), neglecting the pleas of those in need ends up harming

all of us in a multitude of ways, not the least of which is that it impoverishes our species-being.

Practical Action

Movements and Organizations: Support Inefficiency!

There are, of course, multiple organizations and movements in which one can get involved in order to help bring about a more fully human world. Here I suggest at least a few organizations that focus on making meaningful labor for all a reality.

One notable example of an organization which functions to provide opportunities for poor individuals to labor is the Grameen Bank, founded by Muhammad Yunus. Yunus argues that the key to eradicating poverty is putting poor people to work in productive industrial projects at small, local levels. In his personal life and travels, he found that many people in poverty were seeking avenues to labor and meet their needs, but traditional subsistence farming was becoming increasingly impractical, while cities were becoming overcrowded and offered only sweatshop employment. In addition, the prospects for these people to set up small businesses were drastically reduced, as banks were particularly hesitant to provide them small start-up loans (as the loans offered little profit through interest, and a high risk of default). As a result, the poor turned to local moneylenders whose usurious practices kept them from being able to turn any profit from their labor. Thus the problem was not only that the poor were unable to obtain capital, but even if they could get a loan, they fell into a trap whereby they could in no way earn a sustainable income on which to survive.

Believing that the poor would repay their loans if given the chance, Yunus worked to set up the Grameen Bank through which the poor could receive “micro-credit” loans, or small loans (often only a few dollars) for smaller-scale productive projects. By way of example, Yunus tells the story of a young woman named Sufiya Begum in his native Bangladesh who made small stools out of bamboo. In order to obtain the raw materials needed, she borrowed the required twenty-two cents from moneylenders, who then bought her completed stools back from her, providing her a profit of just two cents per stool. As Yunus noticed, the woman could “only survive in a tight cycle...her life was a form of bonded labor, of slavery. The trader made certain that he paid Sufiya a price that barely covered the cost of the materials and was just enough to keep her alive.”³ While simply handing her the money would provide a one-time solution to her problem of capital, Yunus decided to work towards an institution whereby Sufiya and others like her could obtain small loans in order to make such small-scale productive enterprises viable. As a result, he argues, more people will be able to find small business and agriculture feasible, which means they will not need to migrate to urban areas and become the “urban poor,” crowding into sweatshops and slums.

Clearly such small enterprise isn’t the most “efficient” way to produce goods worldwide. (These small individual producers operate within local niche markets where larger producers have not penetrated.) But the human gains from such projects are clear:

³ Muhammad Yunus, *Banker to the Poor* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2003), 48. Cf. Muhammad Yunus, *Creating a World Without Poverty* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2007), 68-74. More recently, in the wake of a rash of defaults by microcredit borrowers, Yunus notes that many “copycat” agencies have sprung up, some of which are in fact predatory lending groups masquerading as aid agencies. In addition, other groups have been established that focus on creating profits for shareholders, rather than helping people in poverty. Yunus argues that such commercialization of microfinance has taken the movement away from its established goals. Cf. Muhammad Yunus, “Sacrificing Microcredit for Megaprofits,” *New York Times*, January 14, 2011, <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/01/15/opinion/15yunus.html>.

meaningful labor, significant income, and the emotional benefits of being able to provide support for oneself and one's family. Thus by focusing on micro-finance, Yunus and the Grameen Bank have put the concept of labor at the center of their attempt to combat poverty, and aided people (a large majority of which are women) in starting endeavors which provide them with appropriate avenues to labor, obtain income, and provide for their families.

Another organizational example comes directly out of the legacy of Schumacher and his life's work. While still alive, Schumacher founded the Intermediate Technology Development Group (ITDG), which has since grown into Practical Action, and spawned similar organizations, such as the New Economics Institute (formerly the E.F. Schumacher Society). Taking the four criteria for development of intermediate technology (discussed in Chapter Five) as their base, the ITDG set out to put a "regional approach" to development into action. They began by developing a catalogue of small agricultural tools and implements that depended upon human manipulation and direction, and were relatively cheap. The ITDG was first able to distribute the catalog and products to farmers in Nigeria, after which their work quickly spread across several other developing nations, connecting with farmers and agricultural producers who eagerly purchased and utilized the ITDG's technological products.

From there, they expanded to develop a series of programs on all aspects of technology that are basic to rural life in developing countries, such as agricultural implements, water supply, energy, transportation, and small manufacturing. Schumacher's fingerprints are clearly evident in the focus of the group, as they work with

small, rural producers to provide solutions and technologies that are easily accessible, labor-intensive, and affordable.⁴

My intention here is not to offer an exhaustive list of candidates worthy of support; I have no doubt that there are many groups and organizations that work towards meaningful labor. I simply offer the Grameen Bank, Practical Action, and the New Economics Institute as a few examples worthy of support.

There is, however, a practical concern here that must be addressed: if enterprises aren't economically efficient, how will they survive in competition with those that are? While such small-scale agricultural enterprises may allow for more human labor, can they provide a living for their workers? My answer to this concern is a qualified "yes," provided that the governments of developing countries are guided by a vision of a fully human world in terms of developing economic policies, rather than monetary cost efficiency. This means that they must emphasize meaningful labor nationally, focus less on competing internationally (which is oftentimes the advice of the IMF when offering structural adjustment loans), and more on protecting and encouraging labor-intensive domestic industries. Opening one's markets without restrictions has wrought disastrous consequences for developing countries (i.e. NAFTA's effects in Mexico, where cheap corn imported from the United States has completely undermined the ability of local

⁴ For a more detailed discussion of the origins of the ITDG, as well as their early successes in a multitude of developing countries (and poor areas in developed nations also), see George McRobie, *Small Is Possible* (New York: Harper and Row, 1981), 19-71. More recently, Tom Wakeford, a member of Practical Action, has provided important empirical information as to how the organization has been able to partner with local groups in developing countries to "democratically" adopt appropriate levels of technology in production. See Tom Wakeford, "Democratising Technology: Reclaiming science for sustainable development," November 11, 2004, practicalaction.org/media/view/5811.

producers to compete).⁵ Countries should have an eye towards protecting small producers and making more amounts of labor necessary, rather than on competing internationally. Government measures may take the form of subsidizing agriculture, not by acre (as the U.S. has done, resulting in the negative consequences that Pogge discusses), but rather by directing subsidies towards smaller producers to allow them to avoid being put out of business, or avoid being forced into being “efficient” by adopting labor-saving technologies.

There are grounds for hope: The U.N. has declared 2012 the “International Year of Cooperatives.” Producer cooperatives are definitely examples of enterprises that function more along the lines of producing and protecting meaningful human labor, rather than merely maximizing profits for shareholders. While cooperatives compete in the marketplace and strive to turn a profit, they don’t do so by slashing labor costs (replacing workers with technology) at all turns, nor by deskilling labor. There is an overarching concern for the quality of labor and the ability of workers to labor meaningfully. Thus if governments in developing countries can work towards providing support for enterprises such as cooperatives and small-scale agriculture to flourish, it seems all the more likely that meaningful labor for all within the context of a fully human world can come to pass.

On the Street: Be Selfish!

Supporting such global initiatives is one way that we can heed our human impulses, and work to make this a more fully human world, but it is not the only way. I

⁵ See here Oxfam, “Dumping Without Borders: How US agricultural policies are destroying the livelihoods of Mexican corn farmers,” Oxfam Briefing Paper, August 2003, www.oxfam.org.uk/resources/policy/trade/downloads/bp50_corn.pdf.

want to return to an image from the beginning of Chapter Four: the beggar on our street. “Global poverty” is not just an issue that happens on the other side of the world; in our daily lives, we also encounter human beings in need, perhaps all too frequently, asking us for assistance. The problem presents itself to us in small situations, ones wherein the actions of an individual can make a substantial difference. To avoid repeating our past mistakes of self-deception, and to move towards a more human world, we must respond to these pleas. When presented with situations of poverty, resist the temptation to turn away, and provide aid to the person in front of you who is in need. In other words, the next time you come upon a needy person who asks for aid, stop and take out your wallet. Whether that means you pass over money or buy the person an apple, you are acting in accordance with our human nature as species-being, rather than against it.

This does not mean that we give every time we are asked; I may not have any money in my wallet, or I may choose a different avenue from which to use my resources to combat poverty. But in the instant that we are asked, stopping and acknowledging the pleas of the other person involves a truly human response. We humanize the other and his neediness, and allow ourselves to be guided by our human impulse.

While providing aid will cost you something, you gain something in return! You gain the satisfaction of helping another person meet their human needs. And even beyond that, you are actively working to make this a more human world, not only for others, but also for yourself. This individual interaction also functions as a reminder that one is part of a larger project, involved in combating poverty and bringing about a human world.

Final Summation

In conclusion, I have argued that current approaches to global poverty focused on utility, human rights, or care are inadequate because of their respective inability to answer particular objections. I am not arguing, however, that these approaches are wholly unsound (from a philosophical standpoint), or that they must be entirely disregarded. Rather, I argue that the weaknesses I have exposed give rise to a need to develop an approach that overcomes these objections, and to do so I argue that we must posit an alternative conceptual framework with which to understand the issue of poverty. Through this framework, based in Marx's conception of species-being, a more persuasive argument for our moral motivation develops. Our motivation to act comes out of a concern for our own humanity, and a desire to avoid the ravages of the self-deception that we are forced to put ourselves through when faced with poor people. In order to make this a more human world and to more fully develop our species-being, we must act to help the poor.

I am sympathetic to Peter Singer, especially in virtue of the simplicity and directness of his argument; it is a worthy goal to try to cajole people into giving up even a small amount of money. That being said, his approach still runs up against significant philosophical critiques (the "utilitarian paradox" and the two critiques of Singer's logic that Gomberg offers). Most importantly, however, Singer's neglect of the causes of poverty is very troubling. I argue that an effective approach to poverty must be concerned with what (and who) is causing the impoverishment of millions. Without critically investigating the causes, any attempts to aid poor people can and will be

undercut. We cannot continue trying to bandage the wounds of the poor across the globe; we need to stop them from being wounded in the first place.

Thomas Pogge's human rights approach makes strides in the right direction by focusing explicitly on causes. I am sympathetic to his claim that we are morally implicated in causing harm to the global poor (a violation of our negative duties). I agree with Pogge's argument that the international economic order is a major cause of impoverishment, and since we are morally implicated in the perpetuation of such policies, we have a moral responsibility to do aid. But his answer to what exactly each individual must do is particularly diffuse: it is not at all clear what I (as an individual) must do in order to satisfy my negative duties. Even if Pogge's proposed structural reforms are enacted (i.e. rescinding the resource and borrowing privileges, putting in place the Global Resources Dividend), I am unconvinced that the global poor will be therefore given sufficient opportunity to have better lives.

Virginia Held offers another important perspective on the problem of poverty, especially given her insistence that we must reflect on our interdependency and our connection to the global poor. They are not merely strangers on the other side of the world, but fellow human beings to whom we are connected, and whose lives are affected in various (often negative) ways based on how we act.

But her ethic of care argument falls short of providing sufficient motivation to act because it relies on a tenuous appeal that people should care about the harms of poverty on the global poor merely in virtue of what it does to them (the poor). It is too easy to argue that I am in no way connected to people on the other side of the earth. Even if I

accept such a connection, I can similarly deny that I have any moral responsibility to provide aid (especially if I do not think that I am causally implicated in the existence of such poverty). Held does not go far enough in establishing the connection between us and the global poor.

My own approach that I have developed here contains four key (interconnected) elements:

To begin with, I argue that we must step back and reflect upon our responses when we encounter a poor person. Such reflection allows us to realize that poverty is not just doing something to “them,” it is doing something to “us” (both “them” and “me”). Conditions of poverty around the world are not just harming the poor by materially impoverishing them, but such conditions are harming all of us by impoverishing our species-being and our sense of humanity. We harden ourselves in the face of poverty, and try our hardest to suppress our human impulse to help. This reaction is dehumanizing not only to the poor person we encounter, but also to us.

Secondly, we must recognize that in order to deal with the dehumanization of suppressing our human response, we resort to self-deception, and try to explain away why we should not have to respond to the needs of the person in front of us. This reaction, I argue, is harmful to all of us. Given this connection of harm, we have a serious interest in acting to end poverty, insofar as we seek to end the harm that such poverty does to our humanity. We want to preserve our humanity, and avoid the negative harms of self-deception. We must resist the temptation to self-deception, and instead recognize the harms that poverty does to both the poor and us.

But we are not only motivated by a desire to stave off self-deception, but also by another, more positive dimension: a vision of a fully human world. This vision provides us with a sense that we do not have to live in a world where such rampant poverty exists. It connects us with the poor of the world, insofar as this is an image of a world that is much more than just “a world without material poverty.” It is a world without the *human* poverty that we all experience in the face of neediness. Thus our moral motivation to provide aid to the other person comes out of a desire to make the world a more human one, wherein we celebrate our neediness and interdependence, and heed our human impulses to help other people who are in need.

Lastly, given this vision of a fully human world, we must question how such a world could be brought into being. We also must think about what is currently impeding the development of this kind of world, and it is here that we turn to the causes of poverty. Such reflection begets a realization of precisely how important labor is for all human beings, and that it is currently being denied to those who lead severely impoverished lives (and, in fact, to most of the world’s population).

At the philosophical level, I argue that in order to remedy the harms of poverty and create a more human world, a significant shift in our view of labor and economics must occur. This change can happen in three major steps: first, we must see the value of labor for individual human beings in terms of their species-being. Secondly, due to our connectedness and dependency upon others, we must see the importance for *all* people to labor for the development of their species-being. Finally, this begets a realization that in

order for species-being to develop we must alter our economic organization and principles in order to provide opportunities for good work for all people.

In more detail, these alterations can begin by revisiting the role that labor-saving technology plays in the productive process. Because of the overzealous pursuit of efficiency, labor has been devalued and (often) replaced by a level of technology that, while it produces cheaper objects for consumption, degrades and dehumanizes workers in a myriad of ways. In essence, the results of such labor-saving technology are that we are wasting human beings, all in an effort to make goods faster and cheaper.

We must change our concepts of efficiency and labor-saving technology by focusing on trying to provide what Schumacher calls “Good Work” through “Intermediate Technology.” In doing so, we will utilize technology only insofar as it allows for truly meaningful labor, and creates opportunities for more people to labor, rather than trying to take human labor out of the productive process.

My goal in this dissertation is not only to set forth a compelling philosophical argument that grounds our moral motivation to act, but also to provide some clear links to practical actions that individuals can undertake, insofar as they may be moved by my above argument.

It is important to note that my argument is not based on a strict moral obligation. In contrast to the arguments of Singer, Pogge, and Held, I am not trying to ground a distinct “must” or dutiful imperative to act to end poverty. These approaches are all too often seen (justifiably or not) as trying to give people a “guilt trip,” and thus they get pushed aside or ignored. My argument instead relies on something of a moral desire;

given their reflection on human nature and self-deception, people will be moved to act because they do not want to live in a dehumanizing world with poverty anymore (both in terms of material and human poverty).

In our current society and discourse, the explanatory burden has been put on those who say we should do something about poverty. When we talk about whether or not to give something to a beggar we encounter on the street, we oftentimes first ask: “What will happen if I give this person money?” I argue that this is the wrong question to ask; the burden of motivational proof should not be placed here. Instead, we should be asking: “What am I doing if I turn away?” Changing this mindset is a very important first step in the direction of a human world.

I have no pretense that giving some change to a beggar on the street is going to “solve” global poverty, or that it will even “solve” that person’s material poverty. Even by getting involved with organizations like Practical Action or the Grameen Bank, one will not succinctly accomplish such goals. But by acting when asked, rather than turning away, we are reinforcing a commitment to creating a better world. The only way that we will be able to bring this better world into being is by doing whatever we can when we have the opportunity. We must be actively involved, in some meaningful way, in the project of creating a fully human world.

When faced with poverty around the world, support “inefficiency.” And when faced with poverty in the form of the person in front of you, be “selfish.” You do not have a “moral obligation” to do so; rather, you should want to do so. It is the best way to help them, yourself, and us.

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